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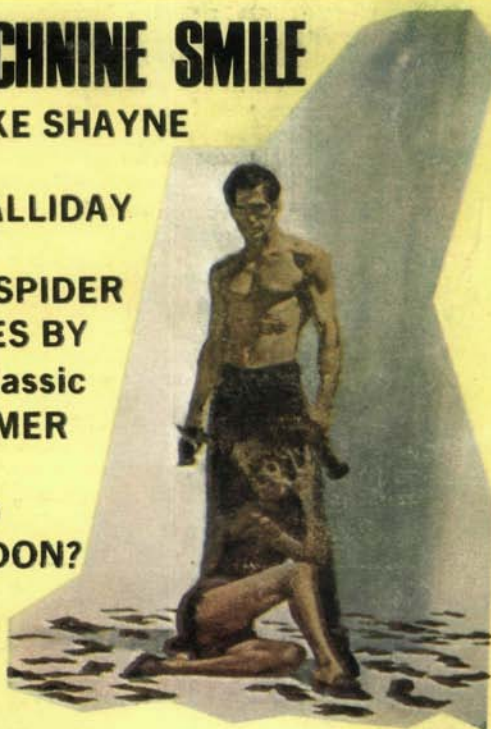
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# MIKE SHAYNE



## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1973  
VOL. 32, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

### THE STRYCHNINE SMILE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*The killers had passed the word: "This man has betrayed the Mafia code. Tonight he dies." For Mike Shayne it was more than a job. A human being, however bad, had hired him for protection. Somehow he must come between him and Death!*

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 32, No. 6, May, 1973. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90048. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$7.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$14.00; Single copies 75¢. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Calif. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1973, by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90048.

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# THE STRYCHNINE SMILE





## A NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

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*Death had reached out for Mike Shayne twice this night. Could he parry still one last grim peril and come back with a killer?...*

by BRETT HALLIDAY



THE BOTTLE arrived by messenger.

After sending the boy on his way, Mike Shayne hefted it, heard the telltale gurgle that indicated its liquid contents. It was beautifully gift wrapped in the bright gold paper that bore the name of one of downtown Miami's best known department stores. There was a small envelope attached to a loop in the red-and-gold cord that held the wrapping precisely in place.

The red-headed private detective opened the envelope and perused the small folded card within. It contained the message, *To my favorite Mike from one of his fondest admirers!* It was unsigned and, from the neatly looped handwriting, he judged it to have been written on order by someone in the department store liquor department.

Shayne had been home in his two-room suite on East Second

©1973, by Brett Halliday

Street less than half an hour. He had just come from a twenty minute session under the shower, in which he had vainly tried to rinse out some of the fatigue and frustration of thirty-six of the dullest, most unpleasant hours he had ever spent, when the door chime sounded and the bottle arrived. As he laid down the note on a table, his whipcord lean, well scarred, lightly furred body was still beaded with water. A damp towel was his only cover. His eyelids were puffed with lack of sleep.

It seemed a pity to destroy a wrapping that was a work of art, but Shayne was in no mood to allow himself more than a passing regret over such esthetic violation. The fine full fifth of Martell brandy it contained was the nicest thing that had happened to him since the strange and unpleasant man named Boris Williams had phoned him at his upstairs office on Flagler Street two mornings before.

Although three-quarters of a case of matching bottles remained stowed away in his bedroom closet, Shayne yielded to an impulse to taste the contents of this one, so unexpectedly arrived at such a low moment, if only to boost his sagging morale.

"Shayne," he told himself,

"Don't look a gift bottle in the cork."

The wrapping came off with a crisp crackling rustle of cellophane; the cork emerged with a satisfying *thock*, and he poured a good three inches into a kitchenette glass that was waiting, upside down, alongside the tiny sink. Holding it up to the window to let the light filter gently through its dark-amber contents, he silently toasted his good Samaritan, who and whatever he or she might be, then let the fine, strong, well aged liquor float slowly over his tongue. . .

Within less than a minute, Shayne knew he had committed a ghastly mistake, perhaps a fatal one. Retching, fighting the red-hot poker that seemed to be twisting itself excruciatingly in his guts, he forced himself to do the thing that, fortunately, he knew how to do.

Poised precariously on the very lip of unconsciousness, he mixed and forced himself to drink a blend of soda and egg-white and hot water. Then, on legs that felt weak as a newborn babe's, he staggered to the bathroom and groped with rapidly fading vision for the bottle of ipecac on the lower shelf.

Ten minutes later, when a semblance of consciousness returned, he was lying, bathed

in cold sweat, on his unopened bed. Moving his limbs with great difficulty, he also decided that he was going to live. He decided, as well, that he was going to be good and sick for at least the next twelve hours—also, that there was small sense in calling in a doctor. There was nothing left inside him for a stomach pump to bring up.

As he lay there, unable to rise, with the red-hot poker still twisting his guts, he tried to decide who it was that wanted him permanently out of the way at this moment. In his anguish, Shayne was unable to put his thoughts in sufficient order even to speculate upon the possible identity of his would-be executioner.

The rapid-fire pounding of his heart and pulses reminded him of something else, something that precluded deductive thinking, something essential to survival. Somehow, he rose weakly to his feet and, still dripping with cold sweat, forced himself to make the circuit of the room, round and around, back and forth, supporting himself by hanging onto the wall, the bed, the bureau, the door, keeping his limbs in motion.

As yet there seemed no symptom of paralysis, but the redhead knew all too well how unpredictable strychnine could

be and had no intention of letting any crippling secondary reactions claim him.

Just keeping upright, keeping moving, was the hardest work he had ever undertaken. But not until he had measured an agonizingly slow ninety minutes by the electric clock on his bedside table did he fling himself down once more, still trembling with weakness, still bathed in cold sweat, to give his aching, trembling limbs a rest.

It was then, finally and painfully, that his mind began to function once again. With trembling fingers, he reached for the bedroom extension phone, intending to call his secretary Lucy Hamilton—only to remember that she was off on a cruise of the keys with a group of friends. Even if he could reach her, there seemed little point in putting a monkey wrench into her period of pleasure.

Wryly, he thought that, if Lucy had been at her desk, if he had not been alone in the office, he would probably not have taken on the assignment of acting as bodyguard to Boris Williams. But Shayne had been bored and restless and the money offered for such an apparently routine chore had been fabulous—five hundred dollars each and every twenty-four hours.

At the moment, he was grateful for her absence. In his mind's ear, he could hear her chiding him, in her very best schoolmarm voice, "Michael, when are you going to learn to take the most elementary precautions? You're as ridiculous as a fireman who lets the firehouse burn down."

In thirty-six hours, the redhead had already earned three quarters of the thousand dollar retainer offered and accepted when he first interviewed Williams in his Palms Plaza suite across the causeway in Miami Beach. Earned it! He had earned it not merely in spades but in all the suits in the deck.

In his time, Shayne had heard of the 'silent American', something his client definitely was not. He had heard of the 'ugly American', something his client surpassed. Ugly? Boris Williams was positively repulsive. In the brief but endless terms of their acquaintance, the redhead had not been able to discover a single redeeming human trait in the man.

He was squat and ugly of face, squat and ugly of mind, squat and ugly of body and soul. He talked incessantly of the female of the species and, while Shayne was far from a prude in this department, his client's conversation was so

graphically disgusting that, much of the time in his company, Shayne had felt driven close to clearing out.

If Williams had said it once, he had said it a hundred times—"For God's sake, Shayne, get us some broads. This is supposed to be a fun city."

Professional ethics, alas, forbade his deserting a client who was obviously in fear of his life, even though Shayne felt more than half inclined to root the thus-far faceless killer or killers home.

So he had stuck it out, although the life threat to his client seemed more and more rooted in the man's imagination. He had only managed to obtain some time off for sleep by personally obtaining for him a pair of call girls he knew he could trust.

Then he had come home—then had come the gift bottle he had so stupidly accepted and from which he had even more stupidly drunk with near-fatal results.

He tottered to the kitchen to examine the bottle, to see what, if anything, his trained deductive abilities could make of it.

Damned little, he decided, after studying it carefully.

The introduction of the poison into the bottle offered little or no difficulty to a

would-be killer as ingenious as this. Probably, he thought, it was accomplished through use of a hypodermic needle right through the cork.

Since the store's gift-wrapping department was separate from all others, the bottle could have been carried in briefcase or handbag and either switched or, via previous purchase, carried directly to the wrapping department. In either case, no sweat.

As for overfilling it, a very little strychnine went a very long way. Shayne lay there, shuddering, as he realized for the first time how close his would-be murderer had come to accomplishing the intended purpose. The identity of whoever it was who wanted his immediate removal from the scene eluded him completely.

For the first time, the redhead felt a certain sympathy for his repulsive client, terrified of an invisible assailant whose identity he did not know. His sweating had stopped and he forced himself to get up and don a dressing gown and move to the living room sofa, if only to get away from a bed wetted by his own cold sweat.

He recalled the unlovely Boris' remark when he had complained of fatigue. "I thought you private eyes were supposed to take a beating."

To this, Shayne had angrily



replied, "Only on TV and in the movies." Well, he was taking a beating now.

Shayne had made a lot of enemies in the course of his hard-hitting, no-holds-barred career. Of these, however, only a hard-core few he judged capable of actually attempting to wipe him out, and out of that hard-core few, all he could think of who were not either dead or in prison, the rest were shackled by the inevitability of suspicion that would be visited upon them by the authorities if the redhead were forcibly put out of the way.

Inevitably, he came back to the employment in which he was currently engaged—the pro-

tection of the unlovely person of Boris Williams. Whoever had the bottle delivered to his apartment had to know that he would be there alone at just that time. He wondered if his client might have engineered it for reasons best known to himself.

Possible, but unlikely on the face of it.

Still feeling like a new-born babe who had just been drawn slowly through a knothole, Shayne picked up the phone and called rooms 1402-04 in the Palms Plaza at Miami beach. It had occurred to him that the unknown would-be killer might have struck at Boris Williams simultaneously.

One of the girls answered, a meretricious brunette who went by the name of Lotos Johnson. Shayne asked to speak to his client, who came on, and said, "Who in hell are you?"

*Good old Boris*, the redhead thought. Then, quickly, "Just wanted to know if you were okay."

"For Christ's sake, who is it?" Alarm bells rang in Williams's brassy baritone.

Shayne hung up. He rubbed his throat, which was like raw liver inside, said again, "Just wanted to know..."

His left hand moved to the lobe of his left ear. The sounds which had just issued from his

larynx sounded totally unfamiliar. His voice was hoarse, lying somewhere in the vocal no man's land between a croak and a growl. His client had obviously failed to recognize him.

Then and there, a plan of action was born. Someone wanted him dead badly enough to have attempted his murder through poison. The obvious next step would be for him to call Will Gentry, Miami Chief of Police, and tell him what had happened.

But this line of action had flaws. Shayne was too widely known, had been too long publicized in the local press and air-communications media for the attempt on his life to remain long secret. Even Gentry's well-run operation had its leaks. And the course of action on which he had determined demanded his disappearance from view.

Shayne still had a client to protect. It seemed at least probable that, if Boris Williams' unknown enemy were responsible for his own near-demise, the motive had been fear of Shayne running him down after the destruction of his unlovely employer. Some faceless individual would even now be listening to a radio somewhere, probably one of the exclusively news-broadcasting stations, for



word that the attempt on Shayne's life had either succeeded or failed.

Until such word was broadcast, the redhead could feel reasonably certain that his client was safe. The trick, he decided, was to remain totally incommunicado until he had recovered his powers of locomotion.

This, of course, was a lot easier said than done.

It meant lying doggo for at least the next twelve hours. Until then, he very much doubted that he would be able to move with even a shadow of his usual efficiency. A sudden recurring wave of nausea drove him back to the bathroom where he retched miserably, trying to bring up the lining of his empty stomach.

When he had recovered from this attack, twenty minutes later, he again reached for a phone. His apartment might be bugged, of course, but he doubted it. That is, if the so-nearly-successful attack had derived from involvement in his current case. There had scarcely been time to set up an electronic listening post keyed to his apartment in the less than forty hours of his involvement with Boris Williams. If it had been, the call he had just made indicated any unseen listeners would not recognize his voice.

Besides, there was something he had to know.

He called the department store delivery service and complained, after giving his name and address, that he had not yet received a parcel promised several hours earlier.

After the inevitable tangles of red tape, he was informed that they had no record of any delivery order for a Mr. Michael Shayne at the apartment hotel on East Second Avenue.

This meant that his would-be murderer had effected the delivery via private means.

Shayne tried to focus his memory on the "boy" who had brought the all but fatal package. Although it was his lifelong habit to study, memorize and file away in his memory virtually everyone with whom he came in contact, the detective was well aware that there were inevitable gaps in his system.

Unless there was some outstandingly distinguished mark of individuality about them, he found it impossible to recall the faces of lessor servitors, men like newsdealers, busboys, parking attendants, garbage collectors and, yes, delivery boys. Also such generally faceless women as charladies, store clerks, hotel maids and the like. It was a failing he had discussed more than once

with his cadaverous friend, Tim Rourke, legman extraordinary for the *Miami News*.

They had agreed this failing to be wellnigh universal. But now, Shayne lay back on the sofa, a damp washcloth over his forehead, and forced himself to visualize the boy or man who had brought him the poisoned package.

What had been his distinguishing features, if any? Shayne pondered the problem, cataloguing what he could of him first. He had been of middle height, at least six inches shorter than the detective's six feet two. His body had been slight or appeared so. Had he worn a uniform? It had *appeared* to be a uniform, but whether or not it was that of the store he was supposed to represent, the redhead could not say.

His speech had been economical to say the least. "Mr. Shayne—Mr. Michael Shayne?" And, at Mike's growled assent, "Sign here, please."

That was all—the whole gruesome bit.

He thought of calling the store again, decided against it. From now on, the fewer the calls, the better—at least until he officially rejoined the land of the living.

What else? Beneath the visor of the cap, the detective

visualized an unremarkable rounded chin, a mouth all but invisible beneath a black Ganghis Khan mustache. Probably young with that drooping bush on his upper lip, Shayne decided. What else?

He could think of nothing on which to hang any further memories. The "boy" might as well have been a humanoid robot, operated by remote control or with a programmed card already set in the meshed wheels and circuits of his insides. Nothing, nothing, nothing. . .

The phone rang, close to his ear, making him jump. Involuntarily, the redhead reached to answer it, then stayed his hand with his fingertips less than an inch from the handset.

It was probably his client, he thought, calling to tell Shayne of the mystery call by the man with the hoarse voice who had wanted to know if Williams were still okay. Also, summoning the redhead back to bodyguard duty at the Palms Plaza.

Or it could be his would-be killer, calling to see if Shayne had taken his deadly medicine . . . in which case, should he respond, there would be only silence followed by the drone of a broken connection.

Or it could be any of a score of individuals who had the

number of the detective's private home phone—as distinct from the hotel phone. Tim Rourke, Will Gentry, even Lucy Hamilton from some landfall on the Keys. It could be any of them, any of many more.

He itched to answer it, but managed to forbear. There were two reasons for his lying doggo. One, he needed time to get his motors running again—and two, if he could keep the poisoner from discovering whether he were alive or dead, he would inevitably force action on the part of a thus-far faceless foe.

While Shayne forced himself to remain inactive, it rang four more times at five minute intervals. Then, while the afternoon shadows deepened and lengthened in the apartment, it was silent and Shayne actually slept, albeit fitfully and uneasily, for the better part of an hour.

He was roused from this slumber by another prolonged ring. So drugged was he with sleep, the after-effects of the strychnine belt he had briefly imbibed, plus those of the drastic means of salvation he had been driven to, that he actually reached for and picked up the instrument before he came fully awake—to be greeted by only the dial tone.

But the ringing continued. Cursing, he put down the



handset of his private phone. It was the one on the other end table—the house phone—that was ringing. He had almost blown his cover before his investigation was even launched.

For a long moment, he sat bolt upright, wishing his stomach and throat would stop hurting, regathering his sleep scattered thoughts as the ringing at length came to an abrupt halt.

It was dark in the apartment now, with only a pale glow from the night light in the kitchenette. The redhead groped for and found an open pack of cigarettes on the coffee table with his lighter alongside. After a single puff, he hastily tamped it out. The raw condition of his throat made smoking uncomfortable if not impossible.

He sat there in the silence of twilight, wondering how he was going to assemble the strength to do what he had to do. Increasingly, he was aware of danger as the full import of the attempted poisoning got through. He was equally aware of his own physical weakness, a weakness bound to continue until he could down some solid nourishment and hold it on his stomach.

Shayne was jolted from his despondancy by the sound of rapid footsteps in the corridor outside the apartment, followed by repeated banging of the brass door knocker.

If it was the would-be poisoner, that person was making an uncommon amount of noise for anyone engaged on such a furtive purpose. He managed to call out, "Just a moment," as he rose, weak but no longer unsteady on his pins, and moved slowly toward the door, pausing only to push a

button that opened the drawer under the desk in which he kept a loaded Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolver against emergencies.

Armed, he moved to the side of the door and said, "Who is it?"

"It's Lillian, you dirty, four-flushing, conniving son of a tin-horn bitch!" was the reply, delivered in deep but strident contralto tones.

The redhead's relief was almost pathetic as he turned the special bolt and then the knob and said in his new croak of a voice, "Come on in, honey."

## II

WHEN SHE stepped inside and Mike Shayne shut the door and locked it behind her, the near darkness stopped her for a moment. She said in a voice whose huskiness was both a good deal more normal as well as more attractive than the detective's creaky croak, "What in hell are you running here—a preview of life in the crypt or are you eating carrots and testing your night vision?"

Lillian made a move toward the light switch but he forestalled her, gripping her gloved wrist firmly. He said, "Let's keep it just like this, honey."

"It's your pad," she said.

"Mind if I grope my way to the sofa?"

Having relieved her of her large handbag, he placed it on a table, slipped the Smith and Wesson into a pocket of his robe. He said, as he joined her on the sofa, "There's a reason, believe it or not."

"What happened to your voice, Mike? You sound like the frog who would a-wooing go."

"If there's a frog here, it's in my throat," he told her. "Now what in hell are you boiling about, Lillian?"

She said, "Pay up, Mike. My girls don't work for nothing and you know it."

"Come again?"

Her reply to that was both obscene and explicit. Then she said, "That client of yours in the Palms Palace this afternoon. He puts Lotos and Carmen through four hundred clams worth of tricks and then powders. Since when are you working for tin horns, Mike?"

Shayne thought that one over. He didn't like it. But the private eye business had its seamy side, some of which was not the sort of thing one usually wrote home about to mother.

What he liked least of all was the news that Boris Williams had taken a powder. He said, "You should have known I was not at home, officially or

otherwise, when I didn't answer your calls."

She uttered a short, sharp obscenity, said, "I was so popped off I didn't give a damn whether you were officially at home or not. That's why I came right over as soon as Lotos and Carmen called in." A pause, then, "Somebody else must have been dingy your ling, sweetie-pie. I didn't take time out to telephone."

Shayne thought that one over. He was inclined to believe Lillian Woods about the phone calls. He wondered again who in hell it had been. His client, his would-be killer or someone totally unrelated to his current problems.

Lillian, in the act of lighting up a cigarette via the table lighter, looked at Shayne's face, thus revealed, curiously. She said, "Mike, what's the matter? You look as if they just dug you up."

"They damn near buried me," he replied. "Why don't you pour yourself a drink? Frankly, I'm not up to much right now."

"In the dark?" she countered. "I'd fall all over your kitchen."

"Okay," He struggled to his feet. "The usual?"

"Why not?" she said. "It's one of the few things we have in common."

Lillian Woods, perhaps the most astute and able call-mistress in Miami and/or Miami Beach, shared Shayne's habitual fondness for Martell cognac. That she should have accepted his offer suggested strongly that she was not involved in the attempt to poison him, though her arrival at this time had caused his hackles to rise.

They had for many years enjoyed a relationship that hovered in the borderline area between acquaintance and friendship. If her profession was illegal, he knew her word was as good as the proverbial gilt-edged bond. He was going to need help. Why not a woman who knew more about what was happening in Dade County at any given moment than anyone else in his wide range of feminine contacts?

He brought her a Martell on the rocks from one of his own bottles and set it down before her—shakily—in the darkness. When he told her he was going to bind her to absolute secrecy, she sighed, then said, "It will probably kill me, but if I don't learn what is going on here my curiosity will do the job a lot quicker. Okay, I won't spill a word."

When he had finished a recountal of what had happened since his return from the Beach hotel, she said, "You

poor bastard. And I had to go and blow your cover with my big mouth. Sorry, Mike."

"You may not have blown it," he replied. "You didn't demand my name at the desk, did you?"

"No. I came straight on up. I tried to call from the lobby booth, but the hotel switch-board girl said you were not answering."

He said, "But she rang just the same."

"I know—I guess I scared her into it. But she only rang once. After that, she refused."

He said, "How'd you know where I live?"

She said, "Remember last New Year's Eve, when Tim was going to bring me up here and got taken suddenly drunk at my place?"

"Okay—Sorry to be suspicious, but—"

"Under the circumstances, I can't blame you, Mike. But what about my girls' money?"

"They'll get it," he promised. "Now, tell me what they told you about their busted rendezvous with my client at the Palms Palace?"

She told him, pulling no punches. "He told them to freshen up after the call had busted the scene. When they came out of the john, he was gone, the son of a bitch, just like *that!*" They waited half an



hour, then went home and called me."

"Did you do any checking around?" he asked her.

She shrugged, said, "Some. All I could find out was that a man named Boris Williams checked in at the Palms Plaza three days ago."

"Did he check out when he split?" Shayne asked, frowning in the near-darkness.

"I didn't think to ask, Mike. Of all the dumb—"

"Call the hotel and find out." He pushed the private phone toward her."

She hesitated. "But I thought you didn't want—"

He said, "If this place is being watched, ten to one somebody saw you come in. If it isn't, who'll know where you called from? Either way, it doesn't matter now, since I won't be making the call, just in case I am buggy."

"Okay, Mike." She reached for the instrument, hesitated, said, "How can I see to dial?"

With trembling hands, he held the table lighter to illuminate the phone while Lillian's gloved forefinger picked out the digits. Her questions were brief and to the point, as was her comment to Shayne when she hung up:

"He's still registered," she said.

The redhead tugged at his

left earlobe again, then said, "I'd give quite a few bucks to know where he is. I read him for a paranoid type who imagined his 'enemies' were out to get him. But this gut of mine tells me they're all too real."

Lillian said, "Mike, why did you have to get *me* involved in this mess?"

He thought that over. Lillian had scores of competitors in Miami and the Beach in the purveyance of commercial sex. A handful were rated as reliable as she. So *why* had he called for a pair of her girls rather than those of any of a half dozen other telephonic madams? A very good question.

Then it came to him. He said, "Come to think of it, Williams *asked* me to call you—said you'd been well recommended."

"This," said Lillian, "is one time I wish someone else had got the business. And I *do* mean 'got the business'."

"I follow you." Shayne's stomach was still hurting like hell and his throat felt like raw metal filings.

But awareness of unseen danger around any corner at any time had set his adrenals pumping renewed energy through his system.

"Dammit!" he growled. "I'm hungry as a bear, and I don't

think my stomach will hold water yet."

"Poor Mike." Lillian sounded honestly sympathetic. "What would you like?"

"A twenty-four-ounce top sirloin steak, blood rare," he said. "Right now, I'm too weak to lift a four-ounce drink."

"No steak," she told him, "and no drink. You need something bland. What's in your fridge?"

"Ice, mixers, a twenty-four-ounce top sirloin. Lucy got it for me before she took off, and I haven't eaten in since."

They both jumped as the phone rang. Lillian made a move to answer it, but Shayne stayed her hand with his. For a moment, they were close, and the dry sweetness of her perfume enveloped him.

When the ringing finally stopped, she removed the glowing cigarette from her mouth, said, "Mike, whoever is after you isn't going to let up on this place, and you're a long way from being a well man. Why don't you come to my pad until you're better? At least I can give you the kind of food you should have just now."

He thought it over. He was increasingly curious as to who had recommended Lillian to Boris Williams, and why. As to whether her running him down so promptly in pursuit of her

girls' four-bill fee was in character, he had no idea. None of his previous clients had ever pulled such a scurvy stunt. But his situation here, alone and ill, was tactically very poor. Besides, if he wanted to pump the woman further, where better than at her house? The more he thought about it, the more sensible her suggestion seemed. If he could get there undetected, it would offer excellent cover, the more so as Shayne was well known as a man who did not have to pay for feminine companions.

An hour later, stretched out on a comfortable sofa in Lillian's luxuriously appointed pseudo-Moorish villa in one of the better residential areas of the city, the redhead decided the move had been a good one. Feeling unable to drive his own car, Mike had slipped out of his hotel via the service elevator and the cellar parking area back door. His hostess had picked him up around the corner in her trim little black Mercedes and brought him to her home without incident or, as best he could figure, either observation or pursuit.

She had plied him with some sort of warmed frozen custard that, while it had tasted terrible, had remained on his still quivering stomach, and he was beginning to feel a slight

return of his strength. Looking around him, at the beautifully furnished living room of her house, he could not help commenting on the rewards her way of life had brought her.

A faint smile touched her gently made-up lips. She said, "You should know, Mike, the wages of sin are wealth."

He thought that over, sighed, "At a time like this, I wonder if I didn't choose the wrong side." Then he said, "Lillian, have you heard of the Mimosa-Everglades Development?"

Her lovely face grew thoughtful. She nodded, said, "Who hasn't?—Why?"

"Because," he told her; "that's the only hint my vanished client dropped about why he was in town."

She shrugged. Her expression grew guarded. She said, "It's big, if the developers ever get it off the ground."

"Who are they? Do you know?"

She lit a cigarette, talked around it. "I can find out. I've heard Tawney Jackson's name, but that doesn't mean a thing."

"Thanks, but I can find it out for myself, if you'll let me use your phone."

"Be my guest." Moving gracefully, trailing the long extension cord behind her, she placed it on the coffee table in front of the sofa.



TIM ROURKE

He dialed the city room of the *News*, asked for his old friend, drinking companion and occasional colleague, Tim Rourke. His luck was in and the lanky reporter came on.

To Shayne's croaked greeting, he said, "The voice is strange but the obscenity is familiar. What happened to you, Mike?"

"Never mind," said the redhead. "Tim, I want you to look up a couple of things for me."

"Is there a story in it?" the reporter asked.

"Could be, but they're damned important."

"Okay. Let's have it," Rourke said.

"Get me some background on the Mimosa-Everglades thing. Find out if Tawney Jackson's involved. And see what you can find out about a singularly repulsive character named Boris Williams. He's a client of mine. Claims to be from the Los Angeles area. I know it's a long shot but see if you have anything on him in the files."

He gave Tim Lillian's phone number before he hung up. Then he turned to Lillian, but before he could speak the phone rang.

She picked it up, listened, briefly, whispered, "Excuse me, Mike. This is a busy time in my profession."

Then, with the cool, crisp, efficiency of a competent executive, she gave the caller instructions as to where to go, whom she was to see, what she might be required to do, what fee to ask. She had barely put the instrument down when it rang again, and the dialogue was virtually repeated.

This time, when she hung up, Shayne said, "Lillian, I'd like to talk to the girls who were with Boris this afternoon."

She said, "Right now? Like I said, it's busy-busy time."

"As soon as possible." His stomach rolled and, for a long moment, he winced in agony.

"Lotos should be calling in. I'll do the best I can," Lillian told him. "Carmen's on an all-nighter."

There were three other calls before the brunette phoned. Crisply, her employer asked her to come to the house. Having hung up, she said, "I don't know why I should do this for you, Mike. I make it a rule never to have any of my girls here unless there's a real emergency."

He grinned at her, said, "You know perfectly well why, darling. It's my beautiful pagan body." Then, when she stuck out her tongue, "Also, you know perfectly well you're dying of curiosity."

She laughed, said, "Also, I want my mun-mun."

Rourke called back a few minutes later, profane and explicit. He said yes, Tawney Jackson was very much involved with the Mimosa-Everglades Development but was suffering from the endemic plague of all such big-time real estate operators, under-capitali-

zation. As for Boris Williams, there was a single brief clipping in the *News* morgue about a man with that name, referred to as a Los Angeles financier, being sued in a spectacular paternity case.

"That sounds like our boy, all right," the redhead croaked. He thanked Rourke and hung up, trying to make sense of what little he had learned from the reporter.

Shortly after that, Lotos Johnson arrived.

Save that she was rather too lacquered for a daughter of wealth or a Hollywood starlet, the young brunette could have passed muster for either. She was stunning in a silver lame pants suite that made her coal-black hair glow with reflected highlights. Her voice was low, her manner deferential, belied only by the occasional glitter of mockery in her jet-dark eyes.

To Mike Shayne's question as to what Boris Williams had said during his four-hundred-dollar rendezvous with Carmen and herself, she shrugged and said, "You were with him long enough, Mr. Shayne. You know what he talked about."

"Did he mention business, money, anything else?" the redhead prodded.

"Not that *I* remember," said the girl. "Things got very active

until the phone rang. Then he changed."

"How did he change, Lotos?"

"Whatever it was, his mind was no longer on us," she replied. "He sent us to the powder room. When we came out, he had split."

That was all the girl could tell him. Disappointed, Shayne gave up and she was soon on her way. He hadn't known just what to expect but he had hoped for some sort of clue to his client's disappearance, some hint as to where he might have gone or why. What had he said that should have given the unlovely Williams such a fright?

He went over his call. Lotos had answered, had turned the phone over to her client. Williams had said, "Who in hell are you?" His tone had got the redhead's back up, not surprising in view of his agonized condition, and Shayne had replied, "Just wanted to know if *you* were okay."

He wondered why that remark had caused Williams to fly the luxurious Palms Plaza coop, complete with hot running call girls. He looked at Lillian, who was regarding him with a quizzical expression.

She said, "Well, Mike?"

He said, "I don't dig any of it—why Williams asked me to call you, why I should be

poisoned, why whoever sent me that damned bottle would expect me to drink it right away, any of it. . ."

Lillian regarded him thoughtfully, said, "Didn't you tell me the bottle came gift-wrapped with a fan note attached?" And, at his nod, "That was a fairly good bet. Whoever sent it had to know two things about you."

"Namely?" He wished the ache in his gut and the soreness in his throat would call it quits.

"For one thing, that you are a sucker for Martell cognac, Mike. For another that, like all hard-boiled romantic males, you're a sucker for any unknown female admirer."

"Me? Romantic?" Shayne was incredulous.

His hostess, said "In my business, you learn in a hurry there are two kinds of men—those who want sex first and a particular girl second. They're the practical ones, the womanizers. The other thinks of a particular girl first, then thinks sex. They're the romantics, even if they only think about a particular girl for a couple of minutes first."

This penetrating piece of wisdom, delivered matter-of-factly, sank home, causing the redhead an internal wince. Shayne hated to think of himself as a romantic, having

always associated this condition with involuntary clownishness and vulnerability. But, reluctantly, he had to concede that it applied.

Lillian was right, of course. Whoever had sent him the poisoned cognac had had his number to a T. He looked at his hostess speculatively, then said, "I wish to hell I knew who it was, and why."

"Somebody," said Lillian, and she might have been voicing his own thoughts at that moment, "wanted to get at Boris Williams in the worst way and you were in that way. Whoever it was didn't want you nosing around afterward, either."

He swallowed another spoonful of the hateful custard to mask the chilling certainty that overtook him at that moment. A line from a cosmetics advertisement ran idiotically through his head—*If he kisses you once, will he kiss you again?* Having tried to eliminate him permanently from the scene, would whoever sent the poison hesitate to try a second time?

Shayne was inclined to think not. He refused a suggested sleeping tablet as Lillian tucked him on the sofa before retiring to her own bedroom upstairs. This turned out to be a good thing, as the ringing of the



phone on the coffee table roused him from fitful slumber a few hours later.

It was Tim Rourke. He said, "Mike? Sorry to wake you, but I've got more dope on Boris Williams."

"What is it, Tim?" the redhead croaked, coming rapidly and fully awake.

"He's dead. Will Gentry's boys fished his body out of the bay about an hour ago."

### III

DAWN WAS barely beginning to streak the eastern sky with stripes of burgeoning pink when Mike Shayne left the sanctuary of Lillian's home, fortified with strong coffee, two dexadrine tablets and part of a cinnamon breakfast bun that hurt going down. His hostess had graciously loaned him her black Mercedes with the remark that it was fully insured.

In return for these favors, his wallet was lighter by five hundred dollars of the generous advance his late client had given him—the four hundred due her two girls and an extra bill for the hospitality she had granted him.

When he had asked her how she had arrived at this sum, the charming lady replied, "That was my fee for an all-nighter

when I retired from the turf ten years ago."

Shayne, feeling genuinely grateful toward Lillian for the help she had given had replied, "A dozen years ago, you were still in pigtails."

"Call it a pony tail to be more accurate," she had told him with the trace of a smile. "Mike, come back. You're welcome any time."

He had given her a quick hug, said, "Lucy would have my hide. But I'll fill you in on all the poop when I bring back the car."

It had not taken him long to discover that he was being followed as discreetly as the near-emptiness of the early dawn traffic conditions permitted. A small van, royal blue in color, remained well behind him but followed him, turn for turn, as he headed across the causeway for the beach with its tall unending palisade of hotel towers silhouetted against the sky.

He considered trying to shake it, decided the task might prove too difficult in the near-emptiness of the streets. As an alternative, he weighed the possibilities of heading into an alley, blocking his pursuer, and then having it out with whoever it might be. But he was still not sure enough of his strength to risk any hand-to-

hand confrontation that might develop from such a course of action.

Besides, there was the time element. Tough Tawney Jackson, when the redhead reached him on the phone a few minutes earlier, had virtually demanded Shayne's immediate presence in his hotel penthouse suite, and Tough Tawney, the moving spirit behind the Mimosa-Everglades Development project, was not a man easily denied. Nor did Shayne wish to deny him at the moment.

Hence, he let his shadow pursue in his progress unmolested. . .

Twenty minutes later Shayne sat facing Jackson. He said, "Tawney, one thing I'd give a lot to know is why the poor bastard called me in the first place."

"Tough" Tawney Jackson, in a voice that would have shaken rafters had there been rafters to shake, said, "Because I told him to, Mike. I had to fly up to Tallahassee Tuesday, so when Boris told me about the phone calls, I said you were the best in town."

A giant of a man with thinning blond hair untouched by grey, the contractor sat on the terrace of his suite overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, by now bright lingerie pink

with dawn's reflection. Although it was the first time he and Shayne had ever met professionally, socially their paths had crossed scores of times.

As part of the Miami scene, however humble your capacity, it was virtually impossible to avoid some contact with Tawney Jackson. An ex-Marine top sergeant with an heroic record in the Second World War, Tawney had come out of the service in the late Forties with a few thousand in separation pay and crap game winnings, unbounded ambition and energy and the irresistible personality of an amiable bulldozer. He had native shrewdness, too, as the baker's dozen of major real estate developments he had played a major role in building in the Miami area alone bore witness.

He wore a costly raw silk robe with bright poker hands splashed all over it and, though the morning was chilly, nothing underneath. On a table in front of him, a large room service breakfast sat cooling, virtually untouched. A bottle of Old Overholt, its shredded seal still on the cloth, however, was already showing signs of hard usage.

He said, "I'll level with you, Mike, not so much because I trust you as because I know

you've got more sense than to doublecross me. I sent for Boris Williams, sight unseen, because I need some fresh money for Mimosa-Everglades Project and he had the kind of quick loot I need."

Shayne opened his mouth to say something, but Tough Tawney cut him off with, "I know, I know. You're going to say, if I ever had seen the S.O.B., I'd never even have considered cutting him in." Another pause, then, "Mike, in my business, when you need bread, you grab it wherever you can from whoever has it to lend."

Shayne looked around him at the opulence, even prodigality of the millionaire contractor's surroundings. The suite on whose terrace they were sitting had to rent for at least two thousand dollars a day although, since Tawney had built the hotel, the detective doubted that he paid more than a fraction of any such sum.

The redhead said, "Why should a man like you need big bread, Tawney?"

The contractor spread his hands, replied, "A man like me always needs bread. The trick is to get it without finding yourself frozen out of your own projects. Once in a while, you need a transfusion from outside."



"And that's where Williams came in?"

"That's where Williams came in. Frankly, I thought he was some kind of a nut, screaming about threatening calls when he wasn't talking about what he liked to do to broads. You were with him. You know."

"I know," said Shayne.

"And if you're going to sound off about that poisoned happy juice somebody sent you, take it as a compliment. Somebody wanted you out of the way badly enough to take the risk."

"A hell of a compliment," Mike Shayne growled. "Another

like it would do me in. My gut still feels like an old acid dip." Then, concentrating on the case, "Was it you who put him up to asking for some of Lillian Woods' girls?"

Tough Tawney nodded. "The way he kept sounding off about well-stacked brunettes made me think of a broad Lil has, Lotos something. So I told him about her. I also told him I went for a sweeter kid Lil has, a blonde named Carmen. She's here now. I got curious when I heard about Williams being shot and dumped in the Bay."

"I'd like to talk to her," said Shayne.

"Sure. Why not?" The huge contractor rose, said, "I'd better get some clothes on. This looks like one of those days. I'll send her out." He got to the French windows that led to the interior of the huge penthouse suite, added, "Don't go till I get back."

He disappeared. Four minutes later, Carmen came out on the terrace. She was wearing another of Tough Tawney's silk dressing gowns, at least twelve sizes to big for her tiny if opulent body.

From the moment Shayne began questioning her, he understood why the contractor preferred her to her colleague, Lotos. Her manner was pleasant, sincere, almost tender, nor

was there a trace of mockery behind the serene light blue of her wide-set eyes.

Her recountal of the events leading up to the disappearance of Boris Williams was virtually identical with that of Lotos until in describing what happened after they got to the powder room, she said, "There was another phone call then. He answered it and—"

"Could you hear what he said?" Suddenly the redhead was alert, his invisible tentacles quivering at the discrepancy in the two girls' stories. His disappointment was considerable when Carmen gently but firmly revealed that she had overheard nothing.

Then, unexpectedly, she redeemed herself by adding "How could I when Lotos had her ear to the crack in the door?"

When Shayne dismissed the girl, Tough Tawney reappeared, his glass replenished from some other source of supply, his manner and sharpness apparently unaffected. The mastodonic contractor grinned one-sidedly and said, "I can read you like a book, Mike, but don't worry. When I'm keyed up, like I am this morning, the hard stuff rolls right off my back. Now—"

He sat down again, facing the redhead, said, "Mike, I figure I owe you plenty, and I

hope I'm going to owe you a hell of a lot more before I'm through. Now I'm really going to level with you."

"Be my host," said Shayne.

"Okay then." His hard hazel eyes grew harder still. "The reason I need bread is because somebody's sinking a lot of loot to squeeze me out of the Mimosa-Everglades thing."

The enthusiasm of the born promoter radiated from him as he described the immensity of the project, a private city with every resort facility that was in the process of turning a vast wasteland of semi-swamp into a paradise for the well-to-do. He said, "I've put ten years into the project already, having surveys made, putting together the land parcels, lobbying legislation through Tallahassee. I've got every bit of liquid capital I own sunk in it already and a lot of my credit and goodwill."

He paused, added with steel in his accents, "If anyone thinks I'm going to let some piggybank rider grab control without fighting, they're way the hell off base. Don't tell me to go to the banks. They've been drooling to get their hooks into Mimosa-Everglades ever since they heard of it. This is my baby, and I mean to keep it that way."

"Have you any idea who's

behind the raid—and I take it this is a raid?" said Shayne.

Tough Tawney slammed a hamlike fist on the table that sent the dishes dancing and all but shattered its glass top. He roared, "If I had any idea, do you think I'd be talking to you now? Hell, I'd be out there crucifying them to their own double-crosses. Whoever it is knows how to keep his tracks covered. All I know is, the stock keeps going up and up and it costs me more and more to hang onto to a controlling share. Sure I've got partners—it's a closed corporation. But I can't stop them from selling out if I can't meet the offers they're getting. It's like fighting John D. Rockefeller in the old oil-pirate days. If I don't come up with another pigeon, I'll be plucked clean."

"What do you want me to do?" the detective asked.

"Bring me the name of whoever had Williams wiped out. I don't give a damn who did it. I want the man who ordered it done, and you can name your own price."

"Have you considered calling in the police?" said Shayne.

Tough Tawney just looked at him, then said, "Do you think I'm out of my loving mind, Mike? Whoever is behind this has the money and power to buy and sell any police force.

No, this one has to be clean of the fuzz—all the way."

"It's going to be difficult," said Shayne. Gently, he rubbed his still burning belly, added, "Dangerous, too."

"How much?" the developer snapped.

"Five big ones—right now, cash on the line, Tawney. If I pull it off, I'll name it as you suggested. If I don't you pay my burial expenses and give my secretary a job."

"Fair enough." Tough Tawney agreed so readily that Shayne regretted he had not asked for a larger retainer. He punched an intercom at his elbow, gave a crisp order before turning back to Shayne. "Mike," he said, "I got an idea you're the kind of a man I enjoy doing business with."

"The pleasure," said the detective with a thin smile, "is mutual."

"Got any leads, Mike?"

"That," the redhead told him, "is my business—like Mimosa-Everglades is yours."

All the way down in the hotel elevator, Shayne prayed that he was still under surveillance. For a while after he drove back toward Miami proper in Lillian's black Mercedes, he feared that the prayer was in for a negative answer. Early traffic was too thick on the causeway for him to pinpoint a tail. Nor

did the midnight blue van lead help. He counted a half-dozen of the handy little utility vehicles in twice as many blocks.

As he paused for a red light or a traffic jam stoppage, he considered the paucity of the leads he did have. There was the bottle of poisoned cognac. There was the delivery man with the Genghis Khan mustache. There was the mystery of Lillian's arrival at his apartment so soon after the delivery of the bottle. There was the apparent fact that Boris Williams had come to Miami Beach at Tough Tawney Jackson's behest to bail him out of his Mimosa-Everglades difficulties. There was the discrepancy in the two callgirls' stories about the number of phone calls the late Boris Williams had received. Finally, there was his shadow in the van who had apparently picked him up at Lillian's home in the suburbs.

Leads all, true enough. But at the moment they added up to damned little.

Not until he had made two turns off the Miami end of the causeway did Shayne spot the front of the midnight-blue van swinging around a corner a block and a half behind him. He felt a sudden surge of relief that he was still important enough to someone to be followed, and

a plan he had been cooking during his meeting with Tough Tawney Jackson burst into full bloom.

Without subterfuge or indication that he was aware of his shadow, Shayne drove to his garage and pulled in by the pumps. Then, while an attendant was filling the Mercedes' tank, he strolled inside as if heading for the men's room. Out of the corner of an eye, he spotted the van in the act of parking up ahead in the next block.

He got hold of Bruce Davis, the day manager, and handed him the keys to his own car, said, "I want you to do me a favor, Bruce."

Davis, a stocky, short man with mechanic spelled all over him, said, "Anything short of murder, Mike."

"Bring my car over here. It's in the garage. And then I want Steve to take the Mercedes to this address." He wrote out Lillian's street and number on the back on an invoice sheet.

"I dunno," Bruce looked distressed. "It'll leave us short handed with the mid-morning business coming up."

"I know." The redhead pulled a twenty dollar bill from his well stuffed wallet. "It's important."

"What does he do when he gets there?" Bruce's unhappi-



ness decreased as he took the twenty.

"He goes inside. He'll be wearing my hat and jacket, and he stays there until a dark blue van goes by." Mike indicated the car that had been following him all morning. "Then a very lovely lady drives him back here. That's the bit."

"Okay—I guess." Obviously, the garage manager didn't like any of it, but he was going along. He went to the rear of the garage, got into a battered loaner and took off.

He was gone less than ten minutes, but in that time Shayne had called Lillian and



told her what to expect and how to handle it. If she were responsible for the van, he felt quite certain her voice would reveal some trace of consternation that the redhead was aware of his tail. But Lillian Woods sounded merely sleepy and slightly cross.

He reminded himself that all women were born actresses as he got Steve into the garage office and briefed him. The attendant, unlike his employer, seemed to welcome a break in the tiresome routine, especially after another twenty changed hands, and they exchanged outer garments. When Steve drove Shayne's car inside, he went out and slid behind the wheel of the Mercedes, started it, waved at the redhead as he took off for Lillian's villa.

The faithful van took off after him and Shayne, behind the wheel of his own car, took off in turn fifteen seconds later. Since he knew where they were going, he felt no need to keep either car in view. Instead, he used another route to bring him to their destination ahead of them, was parked a block away and behind them when they rolled slowly into view.

Steve got out and went inside, was admitted without hesitation. Then there was a twenty-minute wait. With the mechanic's hat pulled low over

his eyes, Shayne slouched behind his wheel with the radio on low. It was turned to the Police band, but nothing of interest came over.

Unless there was a phone in the van, which Shayne doubted, he had a hunch for driver was going to call in for advice. After that, he hoped the man would not be sent back to the same assignment. Sure enough, after twenty-one minutes by the dashboard clock, Shayne saw his quarry move away from the curb and roll on down the block and take a right turn toward the nearest shopping center.

Shayne followed, well to the rear, parked two rows away and waited with his motor running softly. When the van driver emerged from a drugstore where he had evidently made his call, Shayne got his first good look at him.

He was of average height and moved with the springy gait of youth. He wore no headgear and his mod cut left brown hair fashionably long. He could have been anybody, save that he wore a drooping Genghis Khan mustache on his upper lip.

Quite aware that his identification of the false department store messenger boy who had brought him the poison would not stand up in court, the redhead began to enjoy the

chase. And certainly with this fellow, Mike Shayne had a score to settle.

Evidently certain that he was not being tailed, he drove the blue van swiftly through a maze of suburban streets, working back toward the heart of the city. The environment grew increasingly shabbier as he entered an unrenewed part of older Miami that had yet to have its face lifted by an urban renewal project.

Most of the housing was junk, but here and there, behind broken fences and walls, surrounded by gone-to-seed lawns and shrubbery, a mansion stood valiantly, like some old gentleman survivor whose pants were patched but who still wore a faded flower in his button-hole.

Manitoba Avenue, Cape Colony Road, Pondicherry Boulevard—whatever named the streets in this obsolete development must have been an Anglophile, or at least devoted to the British domions, Shayne thought, equipping his vision of the seedy old gentleman with a monocle. The van took a left turn into a street called New South Wales Drive and, halfway along it, turned in at iron gate midway in the only intact brick wall the redhead had seen thus far in the entire district.

On the gateposts, in

wrought-iron embellishment, was the number 335.

Shayne frowned as he drove slowly passed. That number—335 New South Wales Drive—struck a faint gong far back in the depths of his memory. 333 New South Wales Drive—it was not the first time he had heard of it, seen it in print, or both.

#### IV

MIKE SHAYNE was already seated in his usual rear corner table at the Golden Cock when Tim Rourke strode in, his long legs gobbling large gulps of floor with each step. The redhead had decided there was small point in continuing to play the role of invisible man, since too many persons involved in the murder of Boris Williams had already seen him. Besides, for the first time since his unfortunate near-fatal drink the afternoon before, he felt capable of putting some real food in his stomach and the chef in the kitchen would provide what he wished.

Rourke sat down across from him and peered at the pink hued drink the detective was toying with. His eyebrows rose incredulously.

"What's *that*?" he asked. "It looks like a Shirley Temple."

"It is," Shayne admitted glumly.

The *Miami News* reporter shuddered and crossed himself, told the hovering waiter to bring him a double Jack Daniels on the rocks and follow it with another. Not until he had downed them both, did Shayne say, "Well, Tim?"

"Okay," said Rourke. "You remember an old broad named Mariposa Layne?"

Shayne's memory gonged. He said, "Oh, for God's sake! She's the one who wanted to change the name of her street last year."

"Right. From New South Wales Drive to Mariposa Lane. Claims she got the idea from Rudy Vallee trying to change the name of his street in Hollywood to Rue de Vallee. Got the same reaction, too. Negative."

While the redhead tried to make sense out of that, the reporter ordered lunch, a New York steak with French Fried onions, side orders of mushrooms and bacon and a baked potato. Not until the waiter had moved off with it, did he look at Shayne and say, "I take it the meal is on you, good-buddy."

"Not," said Shayne, "unless you come up with something more than a street name-changing fracas."

"Oh, there's more." Rourke sounded almost smug. "Way

back when I was in knee pants, Mariposa Layne was a real red hot mamma in Dade County. She had a few years even, then, but she was still a good looking blonde built like the proverbial brick out-house. Loaded, too. She was on her way to becoming the Perle Mesta of Dade County. "You remember, the hostess with the mostest on the ball."

"What does that have to do with the case?"

"Just this—or rather these. In the first place, then as now, she lived at the New South Wales Drive address you gave me. Sharp as hell. Up to her ears in the postwar real estate boom among other things."

The redhead gave the lobe of his left ear a thoughtful pull.

"Well, she was in on a sweet deal tied up with one of the Protestant church groups. They wanted to increase their well-to-do parishioners and she was offering them posh retirement homes from all over. A sweet little racket. Almost honest except for a few corners here and there. Mariposa had bishops eating out of her hand."

"What went wrong?"

"It was a *Miami News* beat. Somebody tossed us a tip that the flamboyant if sacrosanct Mariposa was a retired madam from San Diego who had got financially fat from the pro-

ceeds of her girls battenning on the red-blooded boys in blue of the United States Navy. Oh, it was real juicy for awhile."

The food arrived then and Rourke dug into his steak and trimmings with the gusto of a born trencherman. Shayne, his appetite shrinking at the sight of such hearty engorgement, picked more delicately at the eggs Benedict the chef had suggested for his tender internal tissues. Ordinarily, he could eat and drink his old friend under the table, but not this day. He wished he had not let Tim con him into the meal but it was a bit late now for such considerations.

When Rourke came up for air and another double bourbon, Shayne said, "I get it now the 'Hostess with the Mostest' bit. Wasn't that a song from *Call Me Madam*?, the old Irving Berlin musical comedy?"

"On the nose. And don't think we didn't play it up."

"And. . .?"

Rourke speared another piece of blood-rare steak, added a large mushroom and slid the fork into his mouth. Not until he had chewed and swallowed did his powers of speech return.

Then, aiming his fork at Shayne like a lecturer's baton, he said, "Deal down the drain, burgeoning society career up the spout. Since then, our madam



has lived behing her brick wall in unsplendid isolation."

Shayne grunted, thought it over, said, "Is there any record of who turned her in to the tender mercies of that scandal sheet of yours?"

Rourke shook his head, mouth full again. Shayne thought it over some more. *Call Me Madam* had been a hit in the early Fifties. Tough Tawney Jackson's star had begun to rise at just about that time. He knew that, if he went down to the city hall and dug into the Real Estate contracting and leasing records he could find out what had happened to Mariposa Layne's shattered deal with the church synod elders. But that would take time and he had a strong hunch that time was running out. He decided to

cut things short by taking a gamble on what he felt was a near sure thing.

Rising, he said, "Take your time, Tim. Have another steak. You've earned it."

"Damned if I see how," the reporter mumbled through still another mouthful. "Hey, you leaving me here?"

"I could do a lot worse for you," Shayne shot back over his shoulder as he moved on toward the exit.

Tough Tawney Jackson, a man-mountain even sitting down; was behind his desk, talking into two telephones at once. He motioned Shayne to take a chair, concluded his calls, gave his secretary an order to hold all calls until further notice. Then he lit a cigar after offering one to Shayne which the detective refused, leaned back and said, "What's new, Mike?"

"How would you react to the words Mariposa Layne?"

The huge contractor's eyebrows rose a full inch. He shook his head, puffed on his cigar a full thirty seconds, then said, "Impossible."

"Why impossible? You dealt her a pretty low blow when you were getting started down here."

"Listen," Tough Tawney said angrily, "it was dog eat dog in those days and I was a pretty

hungry mongrel, right out of the Corps and itching to crack the big time. So when—" His voice trailed off and he said, wonderingly, "Where in hell did you dig *that* up? I've never spilled it to anybody before, so help me."

Then, his face hardening, "Are you trying to destroy me, Mike? Because, if you are—"

"No, Tawney," Shayne interrupted. "I'm trying to preserve the only possible fee I can see for myself in this case. But you just said Mariposa is impossible. What does that mean?"

"It means she had a stroke five years ago and hasn't been able to get out of bed since. Listen, Mike, I didn't even know the poor old broad when I cut her out of the church package. You may not believe it, but, I do have a conscience. Call it a penalty of getting old. Anyway, I've kept track of her. Hell, I've given her a small piece of every deal I've made since. Call it conscience bread if you want to, but that's the truth. After all, I got my start over her not-so-dead body."

"Who told you about her health?" Shayne asked. "I heard she's been incommunicado for twenty years."

"That's newspaper crap," said the contractor with a snort. "She got around when she felt like it, before the stroke

hit her. She just kept it quiet."

"You should like you know her well, Tawney."

"God's truth, I've never laid eyes on the poor broad. I've never even talked to her. But, in a screwy way, I *do* know her. And she's *out*!" A pause then, "How in hell do you figure her in this ploy?"

Shayne told him about the van. The massive contractor listened, narrow-eyed, then said, "That was smart, Mike, switching cars like that. But you've always been a good operator. I don't see how it ties old Mariposa in, though."

"If nothing else," the red-head reminded him, "motive. Remember, the driver who turned in at her gate was the sweet bird of youth who brought me that poison."

"What are you going to do next?" Tough Tawney asked him.

"I'm going to get to see her somehow, and satisfy myself that she's not in it." Mike Shayne got up.

"Let me know," said the contractor.

"Don't worry, I will." As Mike Shayne turned to leave, there was an unusually thoughtful expression on the contractor's broad face. No sooner had Shayne passed the secretary at her desk in the outer room of the hotel penthouse office than

he heard the jangle of telephones through the glass door he had left open behind him.

He drove back to Lillian's Moorish villa. In view of the day's developments, there were a few questions he wished to ask her about the girls she employed. Her door was opened by an immaculate, crisply starched, black woman. Lillian received him in the living room of the luxurious little house.

In a suit of flame-colored silk-crepe lounging pajamas, Lillian looked stunning. But her facial makeup was heavier than Shayne remembered seeing her wear and, beneath its lacquer, he detected signs of strain and fatigue. Her manner was friendly enough when he thanked her for helping him with her car that morning.

"Glad to help—if I was of help," she replied and offered him a drink before remembering his condition and apologizing. Then she said, "Okay, Mike. I'm quite sure this is no mere social visit. What can I do for you?"

"Lil," he said after seating himself in the other corner of the sofa on which he had slept the night before, "if you were told conflicting stories by two of your girls, which would you believe?"

She regarded him with a half-smile, then said, "Before I

try to answer that, there's something I should tell you about the girls who work for me. These girls, all of them, live in fantasyland. Hell, I ought to know. I started out as one of them myself.

"They lie to themselves about getting out of the business while they're still young and have their looks. They lie about the sort of man they'll fall in love with, for keeps, about the sort of lives they'll lead when they quit the turf. No matter how they slice it, it's the same old white knight on horseback baloney, only the knight they dream about today is a smart young operator with unlimited funds or at any rate an unlimited expense account, and his charger is a Maserati or a Ferrari.

"When I was a kid, we dreamed about snagging a nice millionaire. The only trouble was, I never met one. So I kept the dodge going until I wound up here in Miami."

"You haven't done so badly, Lil," said Shayne.

She shrugged with a trace of weariness. "Maybe not—but I still wish I was out of the business. Especially now."

"Why now?"

Another shrug, then, "I don't like this Boris Williams murder. I don't like the attempt

to poison you. I smell a real stink coming, and I pray to God I don't get caught in it."

"I'm with you there." Shayne spoke sincerely. "But how about my question. How can you tell when one of your girls is lying or not?"

"You get to know them, Mike, just like anyone else." She made no pretence at misunderstanding him. "If you're talking about Carmen and Lotos, well, Carmen isn't as sweet, simple and good as she looks and acts, while Lotos is exactly as hard. Once, when a john tried to shortchange her, she hit him over the head with a mop handle and broke his skull. With her, it's all money. I have to keep close watch on her to see she doesn't steal me blind."

"Which one would you believe, Lil?"

"If you'd tell me what it's all about, I'll try to give you an answer," she said.

He told her what Carmen had told him about the second call to Boris Williams, the one while the girls were in the john, the one Lotos had not mentioned his receiving although, according to Carmen, she had listened in with her ear to the door jamb.

"Which one do you believe, Mike?" Lillian asked.

"I'm inclined to believe Carmen."



"Why?" Lillian asked.

"Well," said Shayne, "for one thing, my call was hardly of a sort to send the poor S.O.B. into a blind panic. I merely asked if he was okay. Even figuring my voice must have scared him, there was no valid reason for his splitting."

"So you figure there was another call. Right?"

"That's right. But why should Lotos deny it, unless—" He let his voice run down.

"... unless," Lillian picked it up, "she heard Williams say something that had meaning for her."

"I'd give a good bit to find out what it was," said the detective, tugging at the lobe of his left ear. He regarded his hostess thoughtfully, said, "How do you select your girls, Lil?"

"I don't hire virgins, if that's what you're getting at," she replied.

"I wasn't. But surely there's some procedure, some sort of reference or recommendation involved."

"In this branch of the business," said Lillian, "it's usually their—well, their pimps who send them to me. I know, it's lousy, but that's the way it is. That's the way it's always been."

"Is that how you got Lotos and Carmen?" Shayne asked.

And, when she nodded, "The rest is out of bounds, Mike. Sorry. You'd be surprised at the social status of some of our pimps."

"I doubt it," Shayne rose. He felt certain he had got all he was going to get out of Lillian on the subject. Like all businesses, hers had its secrets. He asked if he could use the phone and called Tawny Jackson. The contractor was in a meeting, but his secretary gave Shayne directions to the Mimosas-Everglades Development that seemed to be the bone of lethal contention...

It was a vast wasteland, some of it partly under water, on the southeastern lip of the immense swamp. In a steel wired enclosure stood row upon row of bright yellow earth-moving machinery ready and waiting to attack the inoffensive soil, to construct hills where none had ever stood, to create marina channels in the lowland, to ram roads through the swampy areas and place concrete house foundations with eyedropper precision along streets as yet unbuilt and unnamed.

The blue of the eastern sky was darkening as its western counterpart took on the rose and yellow hues of early sunset. The sun itself loomed like a small molten volley ball just above the horizon as the

detective paused at the highway's edge to consider the impending development. Of live mimosa there was not a trace, although a huge wooden cutout tree loomed over the big display that proclaimed the project's title and prospects in hues as gaudy as those of the western sky.

At the steel mesh gate, a pair of men in slouch hats, zipper jackets and denim trousers were chatting. Between them, a carbine rested against the fence and a large German shepherd sat on its haunches with its tongue hanging out peacefully.

Peaceful, in fact, was the word for the scene, Shayne thought, the calm before the storm of raging engines ripping the gaunt environment to shreds and replacing it with the neat, machined, stamped out housing of the real estate developer. Pastoral—hardly—but peaceful—temporarily, at least.

Even as he watched, the dog came up to a quivering alert, having caught some animal movement in a copse of runt palms to Shayne's right at the edge of the swamp. Interested, the two men stopped talking and peered in the direction the shepherd was looking. The redhead leaned forward to get a view of the palm copse unimpeded by the window post of his car.

As he did so, there was a sudden ugly sound of popping glass accompanied by the unmistakable metallic whine of a bullet. Remaining flattened against the steering wheel, Shayne glared angrily at the two development guards for shooting at him without warning—to discover that they were still staring at the matted copse.

Neither was pointing a weapon in Shayne's direction. Neither was even looking at him.

At that moment, the crack of the rifle, flattened out by distance, made its unmistakable impact on the air. At its sound, the shepherd, obviously gunshy, dropped to his belly and looked up nervously at the man holding the gun.

Shayne peered in the direction of the sniper, but the setting sun was just to the right of the tangled foliage and its fiery glare all but blinded him. He could see nothing, but he heard the sound of a swiftly revving automobile motor, followed by sounds of a quick turnaround and departure as the two men continued to peer in its direction while the dog continued to grovel and its whines of terror floated Shayne's way.

Satisfied that there was going to be no further attempt to assassinate him just then, the redhead sat up and studied

the path of the bullet. It had plowed through both front windows, knocking little round circles of glass from each. Had he not been impelled to lean forward in an effort to discover the cause of the shepherd's behavior, the slug would either have removed the top of his skull or drilled him right through the ears.

Shayne saw the two guards coming toward him. One of them held the gun, a shotgun, cradled in his right arm and the dog trailed them uneasily. Both men had weather and work-hardened physical faces. They did not appear unfriendly but warily curious.

"Did you hear that shot?" one of them asked.

Shayne nodded, lifted a forefinger to point at the bullet holes in the two front windows, said, "Hear it? I damn near felt it."

"You can sure say that again, mister," said the other man, the one with the gun. "You got any idea why somebody might want to perforate you a little?"

Shayne shook his head. He said, "I'm doing a job for Mr. Jackson and thought I'd take a look at the product. If that dog of yours hadn't spooked, I'd be on the dead side, I guess."

They exchanged a long look. Then the armed guard said,



"Why don't you drive back to town, mister? It was nice and peaceful until you came along."

"I was just going," said the redhead, turning on the ignition key to get his engine rolling.

"Be careful how you drive," the other man advised him. "You wouldn't want to have an accident."

"Say no more." The redhead moved to put his car in drive, then said, "You didn't happen to see anybody in that copse, did you? The sun was right smack in my eyes."

"We didn't see nobody," said the unarmed man. "All we saw was a car when it turned around."

"That's right," said the man with the gun. "It was a small black sedan. One of them foreign jobs. What do they call 'em, Abe?"

"Mayorseedies, Mersides, something like that. I'm sorry, mister, we didn't get the license number or nothin'. It was so far off."

"Thanks you, gentlemen," said Shayne, gunning his motor. "Thank you very much. . . ."

## V

IT WAS close to nine o'clock that evening when Shayne punched the buzzer at one side of the wrought iron gate that led to 335 New South Wales Drive. Although he appeared relaxed, his every nerve and muscle was high-tension-wire taut. The fingers of his right hand, casually checking his tie clasp were mere inches from the butt of the automatic that lay flat against his left chest in its snugly concealed shoulder holster.

He had no idea whether he would be admitted, or, if he were, what sort of reception he would find awaiting him behind the forbidding red-brick wall.

But he had to see the aged recluse who lived behind those walls, to talk to her if possible, to discover for himself what condition she was in. Rather than continue to be a target for

would-be assassins, he preferred to take the bull firmly by the horns.

There was a rapid clicking sound from the gate and, taking a deep breath, he pushed on inside. Warily, he trod a brief graveled driveway, around a clump of landscaped shrubbery that loomed black against the night sky, to find himself faced by an old fashioned portecochere. As he got close to it, a light flashed on overhead, illuminating a large white wooden front door with brass handle and knocker.

As he debated a quick move into the surrounding shadows, the door was opened from within. Lotos Johnson stood there, immensely alluring in a brief white dress that might have been poured over her superbly curved young body. She looked at the approaching redhead with apparent surprise.

"For Christ's sake!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

He moved up beside her. She was obviously unarmed save with the weapons nature had given her and offered the best available cover should the invisible sniper be lurking within the house, hoping to take a more successful potshot at him.

He said, "I came to see Mariposa Layne."

"I don't know if—" Lotos sounded doubtful.

"Who is it?" called a strong female voice from somewhere behind her.

"It's Mike Shayne, Mrs. Layne," the redhead called.

"Let him in, Lotos," said the unseen speaker. "I've wanted to meet him for years."

Lotos shrugged and stood aside for him to enter, closed the door behind him. He found himself standing in a high-ceiled hall, facing a carpeted double staircase to the second story. Following his ears, he turned left, entered a living room that, in size and furnishings, fully fitted the well-kept-up, old-fashioned mansion.

There, in a wheel chair, sat the object of his visit. Brilliant black eyes seemed to crackle at him from a face as round and unseamed as a butterball. Until he saw the clawlike fingers of the right hand that clutched the arm of the wheelchair with a near-rigor mortis grip, blue knuckled, every bone showing through, he would not believe that this vital woman had suffered a stroke.

The hair was still brassy blonde, the round little mouth mobile, the teeth that gleamed behind it pearly white and too charmingly irregular to be a denture. Where most persons who suffer partial paralysis

become sunken and emaciated of face and body, Mariposa Layne seemed to bloom with overwhelming good health and personality.

Incredibly, she said, "I haven't the slightest idea what brings you here, but I'm delighted you found your way. I've read Mr. Rourke's accounts of your exploits in the *News*."

The voice was husky, contralto, palpably sincere—either that or Mariposa was an actress who could have put Sarah Bernhardt to shame. He said, with a smile, "I'm looking for a young man with a Genghis Khan mustache."

The old lady cocked her head to one side, said, "You must mean Harold." Then, suddenly crackling, "Lotos, put down that gun! How many times have I told you no violence within these walls?"

There was a long sofa against the far wall behind the old lady, topped by a long mirror. In it, the redhead could see the reflection of the young brunette covering him with a short-barreled Derringer that looked like a prop from a television Western. He had a powerful hunch, however, that this was no prop weapon.

Lotos said, "I'll put it down just as soon as Mr. Shayne hands over his." Then, to Shayne, "Walk to the table and

put it there. Then step away slowly."

Grimly the redhead weighed the odds. Lotos was making a mistake in ordering him to move away. As he obeyed, placing his automatic carefully on the table, he silently measured the increasing distance between the girl and himself.

While the tiny pistol she unwaveringly covered him with was deadly at close range, it contained but a single charge and was wildly inaccurate at a distance of more than about eighteen feet. If he could move, say, fifteen feet clear and then make sudden evasive action, the chances of her hitting him at all were slim.

On the other hand, he wanted very much to talk with Mariposa. Even if, as instinct told him, she was not directly involved in the murder of Boris Williams and the attempts on his own life, he felt certain that, without the background she could supply him, he would never get to the bottom of the chain of recent events. He had no wish to have his hostess the victim of a wild-flying lethal large-calibre bullet.

There was one way and he took it. As he laid his gun on the table, he took a deep breath and counted a two-beat pause. Then, like a professional foot-

ball player diving over a mass of locked linemen for a touchdown, he made a head-first leap over the arm of the sofa, away from the old lady's wheel chair.

Lotos fired a shattering report and the Derringer's single slug spatted into the back of the sofa behind him. He rolled to his feet and beat her to his own gun on the table by a whisker and rose, holding the Remington's blue-steel muzzle pointed directly at the alluringly gentle curve of her abdomen.

"Okay," he said. "On the floor, Lotos." With his free hand, he took the tiny pistol from her unresisting fingers and gave her a gentle push that caused her to sit down on the carpet.

"Is that any way to treat a guest in this house?" Mariposa said, a steel rasp beneath the gentleness of her tone.

Lotos made no reply, sat there looking up at Shayne with eyes that dripped venom.

"You bastard!" she whispered. "You dirty bastard! You're spoiling everything."

"Shut up!" said Shayne, continuing to cover her. "Sit perfectly still and you won't get hurt." He moved to a position where he could keep both women well within his range of vision, said, "Your Miss Johnson plays rough."

"I can only offer my

apologies," said Mariposa. "As you see, I can hardly live by myself. When she has the time, Lotos helps take care of me. She's been almost like a daughter to me—I fear a very naughty one, much to my regret." A pause, then, "Now, Mr. Shayne—may I call you Mike?"

"By all means," he replied marveling at the old lady's old-fashioned courtesy under existing conditions.

"Mike, would you mind telling me just what in hell this is all about?"

He said, liking the wonderful old harridan more and more in spite of himself, "Mariposa—"

"Mari, please."

"Mari, I'm going to have to answer your question with another. Are you involved in the current effort to steal the Mimosa-Everglades Development from Tawney Jackson?" And, as Lotos made a move, "Stay still—as you were. That's it, sweetie."

The old lady's dark eyes were fathomless. Then the shadow of a smile moved her full little lips and silent laughter shook her rotund body beneath the Paisley shawl gown that flowed over it.

She said, her voice shaking with the mirth she was evidently feeling, "Mike, you could make me swear on a stack

of Gideon Bibles but it would be no more the truth than what I'm about to tell you now. This is the first I've heard of any such attempt. Ten years ago, even five, I might have considered it. Lord knows, I have cause to hate that bull-necked, arrogant son of a bitch. He did his best to ruin me twenty years ago, and I didn't even know he was alive."

"He told me," said the redhead. "Somebody's out to get him. I thought it might be you but he told me you were out of action."

"He's right, worse luck."

"Do you know or did you ever hear of a man named Boris Williams?" Shayne asked.

Mari frowned briefly, then said, "Oh, that fellow they fished out of the Bay this morning? I heard it over TV."

"That's the man. He was bringing fresh bread to Tough Tawney to salvage the deal. I was hired to protect him. Someone, it seemed, was threatening to kill him unless he and his money left town."

"*Tsk, tsk!*" the old lady clucked. "Evidently, you failed. That doesn't sound like the Mike Shayne I've admired all these years."

"Somebody," he said, "put me out of action temporarily with a bottle of poisoned cognac. In fact, they came close



to making a permanent job of it."

"My goodness!" Mariposa exclaimed. "Don't you know who did it?"

"I didn't then," he replied. "But the young man who delivered it wore a Genghis Khan mustache."

"You mean Harold?" The black walnut eyes went round with astonishment. "But why would Harold—Oh, dear!"

"Why indeed?" The voice was masculine and, again in the long wall mirror behind the sofa, Shayne saw the young man with the mustache appear in the hall doorway. He was holding a very businesslike looking rifle in his hands and, from the ease with which he handled it, along with recent memories of a very near miss at the building site, the redhead had no illusions about his not knowing how to use it.

He said, "It was a beautiful setup, and it's still going to work."

Shayne said to Mariposa as if no one else was in the room, "Just what in hell is Harold to you anyway?"

"Among other things," the old lady replied brightly, "he's the best business manager I've ever had. I always handled my own affairs until—well, until five years ago." This with a glance at her withered hand. "I

prided myself on being a shrewd businesswoman, but Harold—"

She shrugged.

"Sorry to have to do it this way, Shayne. It's messy. But you refuse to stay dead."

The man with the Genghis Khan mustache lifted the rifle and took dead aim at the redhead's heart. At that moment, Shayne felt closer to extinction than ever before in his risk-ridden life. For the moment, he felt helpless, incapable of any move, naked before his enemies. Not even the automatic he still held in his right hand afforded him comfort. By the time he whirled, raised and fired it, he would be a very dead mackerel indeed.

Brief respite came from an unexpected source. Mariposa said in tones of angry reproof, "Harold, don't you *dare* shoot him here. You'll mess up the Aubusson carpet."

In the mirror, the redhead saw his would-be assassin hesitate, perhaps out of the habit of polite obedience to the old lady's wishes—and that was all the time he needed. He flung himself to one side and down, managing to whirl and fire from the hip even as he was falling.

Again that evening, a bullet failed to injure him, though Harold's final shot, before he crumpled to the carpet, tugged

at the detective's left shoulder and left a stinging welt in its wake. Shayne's shot, due to the circumstances, was not perfect. But it was not fatal either, though it came close. Harold would live to reveal the financial aspects of the conspiracy and to stand trial for the murder of Boris Williams.

The sight of her pimp-lover lying unconscious and bleeding from an ugly wound in the side of his head was more than the younger woman could stand. Without warning save for an anguished cry of grief, Lotos Johnson sprang from the rug in a frenzied assault on the man she believed had killed him.

With his attention focussed wholly upon the man he had just wounded, Shayne did not see her until she was almost upon him. He could have shot her, of course, but there had been enough killing and attempted killing already. He did not even have time to lift his arms to protect his face and eyes from the frenzied girl's long fingernails.

But before Lotos could rake his flesh, she suddenly took off on a higher arc as Mariposa's left hand suddenly darted from the concealment of the all enveloping Paisley shawl dress, gripping a cane which the old lady calmly thrust between the brunette's fully exposed and



shapely thighs, applying the tip precisely where it would do the most good.

Lotos soared through the air in a multiple parabola of flailing arms, legs and body and her head thudded against the wall, causing her to collapse, out cold, on the parquet beyond the border of the costly carpet.

Mariposa's black-walnut eyes gleamed at the detective as she said, "I hope you'll forgive me for butting in."

"Think nothing of it," said Shayne, in key with the light tone of this extraordinary woman. And, rising to his feet,

"I'm sorry I messed up your carpet."

He politely asked permission to use the telephone, which was as graciously granted. His first call was to Tough Tawney Jackson. He gave him a quick run-through of what had happened, then said, "I think you and Mari had better hold a meeting as soon as possible."

"If she'll see me," boomed the huge contractor. "She never has yet."

"Hold on," said the detective. He turned to the old lady, who had been listening, said, "Well?"

"Why should I see that bastard now after all these years?" she snapped.

"Because," Shayne explained, "I have an idea, when you have Harold's books gone over, you're going to find that you and Tawney are into each other a lot deeper than either of you knows. In short, if you don't work something out, you'll both go down the drain."

"That would be inconvenient," Mariposa conceded. "Very well. I guess I've always wanted to meet the only man who ever beat me face to face." A pause, then, "But don't let the so-and-so think I've gone soft just because of the dribblets he's been sending me all these years. He's going to have to pay through the nose for what he

did to me when I had the synod in my pocket."

"When will you see him?"

"Tomorrow—here—twelve noon," she replied. "And tell him to wear his drinking clothes. I'm going to put the big slob under the table."

Shayne passed on the message, got a roared, "If that Grandma Moses thinks she's gonna put me down, tell her she'll need another stomach—a pair of them!"

The redhead's next call was to Will Gentry, who said, "Where the hell have you been the last week or so?"

"Busy," said Shayne. "How would you like the Boris Williams murder all wrapped up and served on a platter?"

"Are you putting me on, Mike?" Gentry's voice took on dangerous undertones. "That killer came from L.A."

"Will," said Shayne, "in case you haven't been told, the world is getting smaller every day. You'll find him and his female accomplice lying on the carpet at three-three-five New South Wales Drive. Oh, and better send an ambulance."

"Is this on the level?"

"Never more so," said Shayne. "I'll give you the rundown in an hour or so in your office. Okay?"

"Mike," said the Chief of Police, "this was one case I

never figured you'd be in. Do you mind my asking one question?"

"Of course not."

"Then who in hell is paying your fee?"

"That," said the redhead, "is privileged information." He hung up, leaving his old friend sputtering and fuming.

As he turned back to Mariposa, she had her wheel chair in motion toward Lotos Johnson, who was showing signs of returning consciousness. Carefully, coolly, deliberately, she lifted her ebony cane and brought it down hard against the lovely brunette's left temple with a thud that made the redhead wince.

Then, regarding him brightly, she said, "I never could stand a double-crossing harlot."

Shayne was glad to get out of there with a whole skin, firmly convinced that, crippled or not, Mariposa Layne was one of the deadliest as well as the most entertaining member of the female gender he had ever met. He apologized for leaving her with the two bodies, both unconscious, saying, "If I don't get out of here before the police arrive, I'll never get this mess wrapped up."

"Come back any time," Mariposa told him warmly. Then, revealing her knowledge

of his background, "But don't bring that Lucy of yours. I don't think she's quite my type."

"Amen to that!" he told himself when he was safely outside and hurrying to his car parked outside the wrought-iron gate.

He got away just as the sirens were sounding and the rotating red lights of the official vehicles were still two blocks distant. To avoid being followed, he did not switch on his car lights until he was safely out of sight around the corner. Then he drove directly to Lillian's Moorish type villa.

She was alone in the house when he entered, looking exquisite in a white lace house gown that offered tantalizing evidence of the carefully contoured female flesh beneath. She admitted him, led him to the living room, sat down with him, said, "Is something wrong, Mike?"

"Afraid so, honey," he told her. "The police have already picked up Harold and Lotos at Mari's house. I'm on my way downtown to lay it out for Will Gentry right now."

She made no pretense of not understanding, sat silent for a long moment, then said, "Where did I blow it, Mike?"

"You wouldn't have, if Harold hadn't missed when he

tried to waste me at the Development site. He had to have been there first, which meant he had to know I was going there. Also, he used your car."

She made a gesture of dismissal, said, "He thought the van was too conspicuous."

"That was merely the clincher," said Shayne. "The only person who knew I was going there was you. I called Tawney Jackson and got directions right here in this room on the phone with you standing beside me."

She reached for the carafe on the table before her, then hesitated. She said, "How much time do I have, Mike?"

"Not much," he told her. "When I tell Will Gentry, he'll have his whole force after you. I'd say an hour at the outside." Then, "Why in hell did you do it, Lil?"

"Greed," she said. "Plain, ordinary, old-fashioned greed. And I wanted the status Mariposa Layne had before Tawney ruined her. I got my start on the turf with her, remember? When Lotos and

Harold came to me with their proposition, I fell for it. They needed somebody to run the show for them and they knew it. The old lady looked like such a perfect fall guy, with her old motive against Tough Tawney."

"I wouldn't have made book on that, sweetie," said the redhead. "And how about the attempt to poison me? Did you do that?"

Lillian shook her head. "I can't abide violence, believe it or not. I can't even kill a spider. That was Lotos's idea. I came around in an effort to prevent you from taking it. Believe me, Mike."

"I believe you, honey," Shayne said.

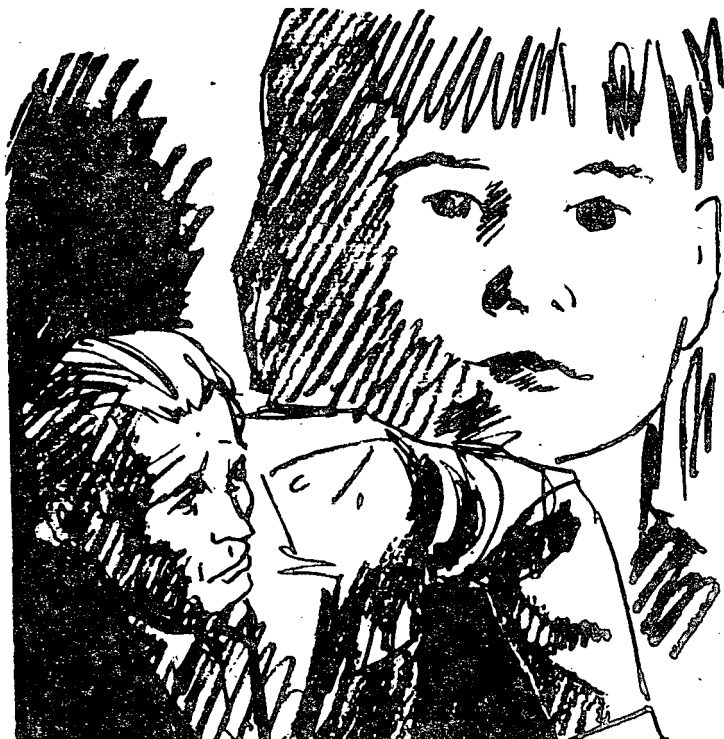
And he did. But when the police report on her death came in Mike Shayne was not so sure. She was found stretched out on the sofa where he had left her and her lovely features were hideously contorted in *risus sardonicus*—the strychnine smile. The carafe from which she had nearly offered him a drink was loaded with the poison!



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THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every issue!

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A strangled cry. . . A shape lost in the  
mist. . . She was gone. He laughed softly.

## PECCADILLO by GIL BREWER

FROM THE CABLE car, the Strelagrat looked elephantine and morning bleak, peaked against cloud-tipped Alps. I turned my gaze far down, staring at Davos, thinking of Monica. Even if she were in the street, I could not make her out from this height. Insignificant.

But Monica was not insignificant to me. I loved her.

"You're so quiet, Alfy!" my wife, Jo, said, tugging at the sleeve of my tunic. Her name was Josephine, but she insisted I call her "Jo," as she insisted on everything. "Why can't you say something? You hauled us

up here so early, now. Can't you be nice?"

I forced a smile. I patted her mittened hand.

At this point I could afford to smile. But not for the reason she thought. If things worked out, Josephine would die within the hour. And I? I would rest in the arms of Monica James. For a while there would be false sadness, after Josephine's body was discovered. But I could be hypocritical without a twinge. I'd had practice.

I looked at Jo, holding the smile, continuing to pat her plump hand. How had I stood it for three years? The money helped at first, but now it was a lump in my throat, because till now the money was not mine.

Josephine was worth nearly two million.

And I? I was not even master of the poop deck.

"That's better, Alfy," she said. "I love you when you smile." She cuddled against me, making little mooey sounds in her throat.

She was like that. Like a cow, I mean. She could moo with the best in the pasture. Ah, God, I thought. It must work. It simply *must*.

We had been in Switzerland for three weeks, first in Geneva, then Zurich. Playing, as the saying goes. I met Monica at a nightclub in Zurich one night

when I sneaked out of the hotel. A breather. Monica. We were fashioned for each other. She was French, a singer with enchanting tone. An hour after we met, I unburdened myself to her.

A day later, we talked of ways and means. Monica was iced wine, with hair like ashes of roses, eyes of wild moonlight, a mouth of nectarine slices. We thought the same things, in the same way.

Now Josephine and I were staying at the Belvedere, in Platz. Monica had managed a room down the hall. And Josephine loved to ski. That had put it into my head. On skis. It was all I could think, as soon as we arrived in Davos. On skis.

There had to be a way—and there was.

"But how will you get her to go where you want?" Monica had asked last night, during an interim.

"Look, baby. She doubts me. I even think she actually dislikes me. I know she does, for that matter. Maybe it's even hate, you see? She's caught me before, you know?"

"With girls, you mean?"

"Well, not with men, baby."

"And what happened?"

"The roof lifted and fell on my head. I can't get away from her without giving up the



money. But if she dies, I get it all. All, baby. All!"

"Only—"

"Yes. Only she can't just die conveniently. It doesn't happen. She's got to be helped." I sighed. "And it cannot be grotesque, darling. It cannot be fancy. No frills. No chance of returns, see? It has to be matter-of-fact."

"And you think you can pull it off?"

"Yes."

"You didn't tell me how you'll be able to get her to go where you want, do what you ask."

"That's the funny part. She hates me. She doesn't trust me, but she needs me. She wants me. She has insisted to herself that she loves me." I shrugged. "So she does things when I ask her. As long as we're together, that is."

Josephine was tugging at my sleeve again. She smiled cowlike up at me, and batted these big brown eyes. She was going to say something, but just then the cable car connected with the ramp. It swung back and forth, then locked. The operator, Swiss, maybe sixty, beamed at us.

"You'll be all alone out there," he said. He had one of these down-home voices, with a French accent. "So early in the morning, nobody's washed out

their hangover yet." He laughed at his little joke.

Josephine laughed with him. "Oh," she said. "We like to come early. Don't we, Alfy? And Alfy doesn't drink any more. He does it just for me. Isn't that wonderful?"

Ah, I could almost stomach it, knowing what I knew. But there had been times when I'd come close to throwing up.

"Come on, Jo," I said.

We picked up our skis, and left the car. We crossed the ramp, and Josephine edged toward the lodge building, where there would be a smoking fire, and warm coffee, or hot chocolate.

"Let's ski," I said. "That's what we came for."

"All right, Alfy."

This close to the bloody thing, I wanted it overwith. I was pent up, let me tell you. I was sweating.

We came along the path beside the lodge, and struck out across the snow. I knew exactly where to go.

I let her walk ahead of me. She had her ski poles, and I carried my poles, and my skis, and her skis.

She lumbered from side to side like a cow, too. Even in a cocktail dress she lumbered. Jabbing the poles into the snow, and waddling from side to side. Every now and again,

she would turn her round, moony, cow face over her shoulder, and grin at me.

She had a broad mouth and her plump lips were shapeless and extremely pale. Her nose was almost as flat as an Eskimo's, and she had to draw on the eyebrows.

Otherwise, she wore a wig. Beautiful.

Now in the very beginning, I'd been despondent. I'd set out to take her to the cleaners, and marry her, and be wealthy. Nothing mattered. It was a rebound situation that was long overwith. I had reckoned on having my own way, at the time, being able to run about and play with Josephine's fortune.

Nothing like it. Her reins were tight.

I hated her. Flesh, bone and mind. What mind?

For three years I'd born it. For three years I had suffered.

She could be cruel. She wouldn't give me any money. She would not speak for hours. When she did it was to bite at me. Then, suddenly, she would laugh and giggle, and moo. And it would be all love and slop, mixed in with the hate.

But not any more. Not after today.

"Hurry, Alf! There's been a new snow. I love it when there's new snow! Nobody's been here.

Just us, Alf. Look—look around. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Yeah. Great."

I thought of how it would be here with Monica. The pristine snow. The beauty, so powerful it could tug at your guts and raise the hackles.

We were past the hill now, out of sight of the lodge. There were several ski runs.

Hell, I'd known there was fresh snow.

It made it easier for me. She couldn't exactly tell where the runs were. She would go where I asked. In two hours there would be countless ski tracks. If they spotted hers, maybe they'd find the body quicker.

"Where will we ski, Alf?"

She plowed through fluffy snow. It didn't matter to her that there was no crust at all. She was laughing about the whole thing.

I said, "Right here, Jo."

"Here?"

"Yes. Put your skis on, now."

I watched her as she leaned and knelt and buckled her skis. Damned if I'd help her. I put on my own skis.

There were three slopes. Two toward Davos. At the first fall, in the autumn, they held races down to the main street. The champ got drunk.

The third slope was to the west. It went out, with a

swollen lip in a grand curve. Beautiful. But that was it. Beyond the curving lip of glittering snow was a thousand foot drop. Straight down to rocks.

Usually there were several instructors about, to prevent errant skiers from flying to their doom. This early, we were quite alone, as I'd known we would be.

The year before, we'd come here. Josephine had sprained her ankle and was laid up in the hotel room. I lushed at the bar, and then came here. I took the western slope, danced on the edge, and a German instructor saved me with a violent hissing rush. We sprawled on the extreme edge.

"Close," he had said.

"Thanks." He asked my name, and was apologetic.

If he hadn't been there, I would have made like an eagle, for moments. I did not tell my wife of the episode.

Josephine had her skis on.

She stood straight and eager, with her poles rammed into the soft snow.

"Where'll we go, Alfy?"

"Right over there," I said, pointing down the glorious western slope. "We'll circle around, below, and I'll show you a new way to town. It cuts straight through the mountain. Loveliest thing you ever saw.



You go first, Jo. Be right behind you. Now, give a few good hard shoves, and really get going, because there's an upslope down a way."

"Oh, Alf! You're positively beautiful!"

I grinned at her. I felt hot and good with it. It drove straight through me. It was a feeling I hoped I would have forever.

"Now?" she said, giggling.

"Yes. Make it fast, Jo! See you—"

She took off. I stood there and watched. She raced down the slope, then took the swollen snow lip with ski poles askew, and vanished. I heard her yell once. It reached up over the ski runs, hooding the morning.

Fantastic.

On the way down in the

cable car, the Swiss operator said, "Where is your wife? Is she at the lodge?"

"Still skiing," I told him. "I'm having a touch of stomach trouble. Back to the room for me."

"Tough," he muttered, shaking his head. "She is very pretty, your wife."

"Thanks," I said, wondering why he lied.

I couldn't wait to be with Monica. We could spend some time together without fear. They would not discover the body in a hurry. By evening, I would sound the alarm. "*My wife has vanished. She didn't return from skiing this morning. I'm very worried.*"

Of course, somebody might spot her tracks and find her before evening. This would not change things.

Monica and I would be quite circumspect. I would go to her room, and we would not leave the hotel.

In my room, I stripped off my clothes, leaped on to the bed, and jumped up and down. I wanted to yell it out, shout it.

Somehow, I forced myself to be calm. I showered, dressed, checked the hall, and went to Monica's room.

"Alfred! Did you—"

"She went down like a slug of brandy. It couldn't be more perfect."

"Oh, Alfred!"

She came into my arms, and we just stood there, clinging to each other.

"I'm starved, for some reason," I said. "Order a big breakfast for yourself, and I'll eat it."

She went to the phone.

I sat on the bed, and stared at my feet. For God's sake, I wanted to giggle.

Monica showered me with questions as to how it had gone. I went over every detail with precise, exquisite enjoyment. "She flew," I said. "She positively flew, I tell you, baby."

"Did she scream—I mean, when she—"

"Yes."

I could still hear that yell. Wild, it had been. Echoing in the cold, bright morning.

The breakfast came, and I ate with gusto. My appetite was terrific for the first time in three years. I tasted every bite. I chewed and swallowed with a glow of satisfaction.

"Alfred Brittany," Monica said. "You are mine!"

"Yes. Yes, yes."

We clung to each other again, kissing, and knowing we could not get enough of each other. Ever. I damned near swooned with it. I loved her, you see. Every touch was delicious. Every kiss was savage

promise. Every word was flat out ecstasy.

"We must stay here till this afternoon," I said. "Then I'll report her missing. Then, for a time, we cannot be seen together, baby. It'll have to be like that."

She clung even more wildly. I could feel the entire imprint of her body against mine. I didn't want to let her go, even for a second.

"We'll be rich," I murmured. "Very, very, rich."

"Tell me, Alfred."

We were standing beside the bed. The door broke in with a shattering crash, and two men crowded into the room. Flash bulbs popped. Cameras clicked.

In that excruciating moment, Monica, frightened, clung to me even more desperately.

They took probably six photos, just to make certain. Then they left, grinning slyly.

Josephine moved from behind the door. She stepped into the room. Her face was quite

pale, and her eyes were glittering with fury.

"You would kill me, wouldn't you?"

I said nothing.

"I know what you planned, smarty. It didn't work, did it? You thought I'd fall to my death. But, you idiot, they even wrote me about it. I never told you. During the summer. They wrote me, apologizing for what had happened to you. Yes. You! You nearly skied over that precipice last year. They had your name."

I stared at her.

"They spent the entire summer grading that slope. It's a ski run, now." She began to laugh wildly. "I've been waiting for the chance to catch you with somebody. And I knew about her, since Zurich. Now I can divorce you, get rid of you. Drop dead, Alfy!"

Whirling, she left the room.

I looked at Monica and she looked at me.

Ah, God...

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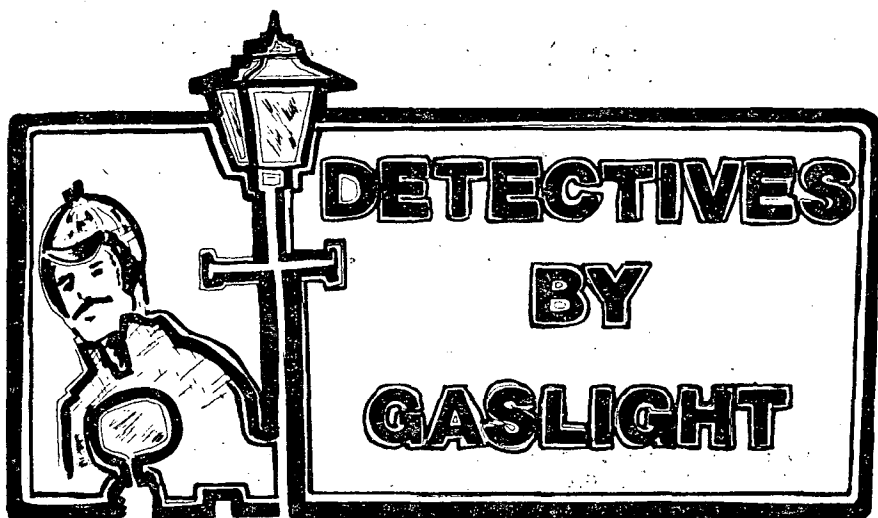
**NEXT MONTH:**

## **COUNTRY FOR SALE**

**A. Mongo Frederickson Novelet**

**by GEORGE C. CHESBRO**

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When A. Conan Doyle killed off his fictional hero Sherlock Holmes, neither he nor his publishers, *THE STRAND MAGAZINE*, were prepared for the public furore and outcry which followed from anguished readers all over the world. Faced with virtual boycott and plummeting sales, the Strand editors sought a substitute author and character to take the place of something that had become immortal before their unseeing eyes. They found a solution, at least in part, in a succession of better than average writers. Their efforts, while markedly different from the irreplaceable Sherlock Holmes, had marked merit in their own right and very soon took up a large part of the slack, although the void could never be completely filled. F. Austin Freeman dates from this period. Collaborating with Dr. J.J. Pitcairn, Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke stories are authentic in medical background, ingenious as to plot and rattling good tales to boot. They were published in this country in *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* and as hard cover novels by Dodd, Mead and enjoyed great success until Freeman's death in the '40's. Thomas Beer called it *The Mauve Decade*. To Edith Wharton it was *The Age of Innocence*. The French dubbed it *fin de siècle*. To prosaic Englishmen it was *the Turn of the Century*. At all odds, the era marked the emergence and the flowering of the detective story as we know it today. Wilkie Collins started it with "*The Moonstone*," published in the 1860's. Conan-Doyle, with Sherlock Holmes, made the detective tale a household must for reading. And after his ill-advised decision to kill off the fabulous Holmes, literally scores of fine fictioneers took up what he had let go. Some of them failed and are lost in obscurity. Far too many have been neglected by even discriminating readers. A notable exception was Sax Rohmer. From his early tales to his never-to-be-forgotten prince of evil, Fu Manchu, Rohmer captured the daydreams and the imagination of readers all over the world. "*The Green Spider*," printed here for the first time in America, is a splendid example of the tales that launched him on the road to fame.

LEO MARGULIES

# THE GREEN SPIDER

by SAX ROHMER

With An Introduction By

SAM MOSKOWITZ

SAX ROHMER was born Arthur Henry Ward to his parents, Margaret Mary Furey and William Ward in Birmingham, England on February 15, 1883.

Both of his parents were Irish, and his mother was descended from a 17th century Irish general named Patrick Sarsfield.

On his eighteenth birthday, the young man decided that he preferred that ancestor's last name to his own middle name, and changed his name to Arthur Sarsfield Ward. It was under that name that most of his early writings appeared.

Temperamentally unsuited for banking and other earlier clerical jobs, he showed some early ability at illustrating, but finally decided he liked writing better. His first professional work began to appear in prominent British magazines

dated 1904. *The Green Spider* was published in PEARSON'S MAGAZINE for October of that year.

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE was one of the leading family publications of England, ranking with THE STRAND MAGAZINE, PALL MALL MAGAZINE, CASSELL'S MAGAZINE and others of like popularity. It had a special edition published in the United States which eventually metamorphosized into a completely separate publication having no relationship to its British parent. PEARSON'S MAGAZINE was also a prime showcase for the fantasies of H. G. Wells, having published his novels *The War of the Worlds*, *The Sea Lady*, *The first Men on the Moon* and many short stories.

*The Green Spider* is a simon-pure, legitimate detective



story in the classic meaning of the term. Yet, in keeping with his penchant for the highly imaginative, the man who would eventually write as Sax Rohmer first tries to give the impression that a monstrous spider or even the supernatural is the only explanation for the event he describes.

Fu-Manchu would not appear on the scene for another eight years, when THE STORY

TELLER, England's first pulp magazine, would begin them as a series of ten stories starting with the issue of October, 1912. Like scores of other famous writers, the man whom the world would know as Sax Rohmer proves in *The Green Spider* that he was a skillful storyteller long before his cruel and enigmatic Oriental villain became a chilling world favorite.

## THE GREEN SPIDER

by SAX ROHMER

I FIND from my notes that Professor Brayme-Skepley's great lecture, which was to revolutionize modern medicine, should have been delivered upon the fifteenth of March, and many of Europe's leading scientists were during the preceding week to be seen daily in the quaint old streets of Barminster—for the entire world of medical science was waiting agog for the revelation of the Brayme-Skepley treatment.

Many people wondered that Brayme-Skepley should deliver a lecture so vastly important in old-world Barminster rather than in London; but he was not a man to be coerced—so the

savants, perforce, came to Barminster.

At twelve, midnight, as nearly as can be ascertained, on the fourteenth of March the porter in charge of the North Gate—by which direct admission can be gained to the quadrangle—was aroused by a loud ringing of his bell.

Hurrying to the door of his little lodge, he was surprised to find at the gate the gaunt figure of Professor Brayme-Skepley, enveloped in a huge fur coat. He hastened to unlock the wicket and admit the great scientist.

"I am sorry to trouble you at so late an hour, Jamieson," said the professor, "but there



are some little preparations which I must make for tomorrow's lecture. I shall probably be engaged in the bacteriological laboratory for a couple of hours. You will not

mind turning out with the key?"

He slipped a sovereign into the porter's hand as he spoke and Jamieson only too gladly acquiesced.

The fire in the little sitting-room of the lodge was almost extinct, but Jamieson revived it, and, putting on a shovelful of coal, lighted his pipe, and sat smoking for about an hour. At one o'clock he stepped outside, and glanced across the quadrangle.

The professor was still working, and, finding the night air chilly, Jamieson was about to turn in again when a light suddenly appeared in the top window of one of those ancient houses in Spindle Lane. The house was the last of the row, and overlooked the bacteriological laboratory.

"That's old Kragg's house," muttered the porter; "but I didn't know anybody lived there since the old man died."

The light was a vague and flickering one, almost like that of a match; and, as he watched, it disappeared again. There was something uncanny about this solitary light in a house which he believed to be uninhabited, so, with a slight shudder, Jamieson returned to the comforts of his fireside.

Curiously enough, I had been reading upon this particular night in Harborne's rooms; and at something like twenty minutes past two I knocked the ashes from my pipe, and was about to depart—when there came a sudden scuffling on the

stairs. We both turned just as the door was flung open, and Jamieson, white-faced and wild-eyed, stumbled, breathless, into the room.

"Thank Heaven I've found somebody up!" he gasped. "Yours was the only window with a light!"

"Where's the brandy?" I said, for the man seemed inclined to faint upon the sofa.

A stiff glass of cognac pulled him together somewhat, and, with a little colour returning to his face, but still wild of eye, he burst out:

"Professor Brayme-Skepley has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" echoed Harborne.

"And no mortal hand has done the thing, sir!" continued the frightened man. "Heaven grant I never see the like again!"

"You're raving!" I said with an assumption of severity, for Jamieson's condition verged closely upon that of hysteria. "Try to talk sense. Where is the professor?"

"In the bacteriological laboratory, sir."

"How long has he been there?"

"Since twelve o'clock!"

I glanced at Harborne in surprise.

"What was he doing there?" inquired the latter.

"He said he had some preparations to make for his lecture."

"Well, get on! Here, have another pull at the brandy. How do you know he's dead?"

"I went to ask him how much longer he was going to be."

"Well?"

"He didn't answer to my knocking, although there was a light burning. The door was locked from the inside, so I got on to the dust-box, and just managed to reach a window-ledge. I pulled myself up far enough to look inside; and then—I dropped down again!"

"But what did you see, man? What did you see?"

"I saw Professor Brayme-Skepley lying dead on the floor among broken jars by an overturned table. There were only two lamps on—those over the table—and his head came just in the circle of light. His body was in shadow."

"What else?"

"Blood! His hair all matted!"

"Come on, Harborne!" I cried, seizing my hat. "You too, Jamieson!"

"For the love of Heaven, gentlemen," gasped the man, grasping us each by an arm, "I couldn't! You haven't heard all!"

"Then get on with it!" said

Harborne. "Every second is of importance."

"I ran for the window ladder, gentlemen; and when I came back with it the electric lamps were out!"

"Out?"

"I ran up the ladder, and looked in at the window; and saw—how can I tell you what I saw?"

"Don't maunder!" shouted Harborne. "What was it?"

"It was a thing, sir, like a kind of green spider—only with a body twice the size of that football!"

Harborne and I looked at one another significantly.

"You're a trifle overwrought, Jamieson," I said, laying my hand upon his shoulder. "Stay here until we come back."

The man stared at me.

"You don't believe it," he said tensely; "and you'll go into that place unprepared. But I'll swear on the Book that there was some awful thing not of this earth creeping in the corner of the laboratory!"

Harborne, with his hand on the door-knob, turned undecidedly.

"Which corner, Jamieson?" he inquired.

"The north-west, sir. I just caught one glimpse of it through the opening in the partition."

"How could you see it, since all the lights were out?" Harborne asked.

The porter looked surprised. "That never occurred to me before sir," he said; "but I think it must have shone—something like the bottles of phosphorus, sir!"

"Come on!" said my friend. And without further ado we ran downstairs into the Square.

A cheerful beam of light from the door of the lodge cut the black shadows of the archway as we approached, and served to show that the panic-stricken porter had left the wicket open. As we hurried through and sprinted across the quadrangle we were met by a cold, damp wind from the direction of the river. The night was intensely dark, and the bacteriological laboratory showed against the driving masses of inky cloud merely as a square patch of blackness.

"Here's the ladder," said Harborne suddenly; and we both paused, undecided how to act.

"Try the lodge door," I suggested.

We rattled the handle of the door, but it was evidently locked, so that for a moment we were in a quandary. Harborne mounted the ladder and peered into the impenetrable shadows of the labora-

tory, but reported that there was nothing to be seen.

"We must burst the door in," I said; "it hasn't a very heavy lock."

We accordingly applied our shoulders to the door, and gave a vigorous push. The lock yielded perceptibly. I then crashed my heel against the woodwork just over the keyhole, and the door flew open. We immediately detected a most peculiar odour.

"It's the broken bottles," muttered Harborne. "The switch is over against the wall by the bookcase; we must go straight for that."

Cautiously we stepped into the darkness, and at the third or fourth step there was a crackling of glass underfoot. My boot slipped where some sticky substance lay, and I gave an involuntary shudder. A moment later I heard an exclamation of disgust.

"The wall is all wet!" said Harborne.

Then he found the electric buttons, and turned on the lights in rapid succession.

Heavens! How can I describe the picture revealed! Never have I witnessed such a scene of chaos, fearsome in its indications of an incredible struggle.

At first glance the place gave an impression of having been wantonly wrecked by a mad-

man. Scarcely a jar or bottle remained upon the shelves, all being strewn in fragments upon the floor, which was simply swimming in the spilled spirits and preservatives. The door of the case that had contained the specimens of bacilli was wide open, and the glass completely smashed. The priceless contents were presumably to be sought among the hundred and one objects lying in the liquid on the floor.

Most of the books from the shelf were distributed about the place as though they had been employed as missiles, and one huge volume was wedged up under the frosted glass of the skylight in the centre of the roof. In the wood of the partition a lancet was stuck, and a horribly suggestive streak linked it with a red pool upon the floor. A table was overturned, and the two lamps immediately above it were broken. Of Professor Brayme-Skepley there was no sign, but his hat and fur coat hung upon a hook where he had evidently placed them on entering.

For some time we surveyed the scene in silence. Then Harborne spoke.

"What are these marks on the wall?" he said. "They are still wet. And where is the Professor?"

The marks alluded to were a

series of impressions in the shape of irregular rings passing from the pool on the floor to the four walls and up the walls to where the shadows of the lamp shades rendered it impossible to follow them. I pulled down a lamp, and turned the shade upwards, whereupon was revealed a thing that caused me a sudden nausea.

The marks extended right to the top of the wall, and could furthermore be distinguished upon the ceiling; and on the framework of the skylight was the reddish-brown impression of a human hand!

"Drop it!" said Harborne huskily. "If we stay here much longer we shall have no pluck left for looking behind the partition."

The northern end of the laboratory is partitioned off to form a narrow apartment, which runs from side to side of the building, but is only some six feet in width. It is lined with shelves whereon are stored the greater part of the materials used in experiments, and is lighted by a square window at the Spindle Lane end, beneath which is a sink. The partition does not run flush up to the western wall, but only to within three feet of it, leaving an opening connecting the store-room with the laboratory proper. There are two electric

lamps in the place, one over the sink, and the other in the centre; but they cannot be turned on from the laboratory, the switch being behind the partition. Consequently the storeroom was in darkness, and, ignorant of what awful thing might be lurking there, we yet, in justice to the missing man, had no alternative but to enter.

Harborne, whose pallor can have been no greater than my own, strode quickly up the laboratory, and passed through the opening in the partition, I following closely behind. I heard the click of the electric switch; but only one lamp became lighted. That over the sink was broken.

We were both, I think, anticipating some gruesome sight; but, singular to relate, the only abnormal circumstance that at first came under our notice was that of the broken lamp. A sudden draught of air, damp and cold, that set the other shade swinging drew our attention to the fact that the window had been pulled right away from its fastenings and lay flat down against the wall. Then Harborne detected the gruesome tracks right along the centre of the floor; and under the window we made a further discovery.

The wall all round the casement was smeared with

blood, and the marks of a clutching hand showed in all directions.

"Good heavens!" I muttered; "this is horrible! It looks as though he had been dragged——"

There was a queer catch in Harborne's voice as he answered: "We must get out a party to scour the marshes."

"Hark!" I said. "Jamieson has been knocking some of them up. Here they come across the quad."

A moment later an excited group was surveying the strange scene in the laboratory.

"Clear out and get lanterns, you fellows!" shouted Harborne. "His body has been dragged through the window!"

"What's this about a green spider?" called several men.

"Don't ask me!" said my friend. "I am inclined to agree with Jamieson that this is not the doing of a man. We must spread out and examine Spindle Lane and the surrounding country until we find the Professor's body."

During the remainder of that never-to-be-forgotten night a party which grew in number as the hours wore on to dawn scoured the entire countryside for miles round. Towards five o'clock the rain suddenly broke over the marshes, and drenched us all to the skin, so that it was



a sorry gathering that returned at daybreak to Barminster. The local police had taken charge of the laboratory, and urgent messages had been sent off to Scotland Yard; but when the London experts arrived on the scene we had nothing more to tell them than has already been recounted. Harborne, Doctor Davidson, and myself had devoted the whole of our attention to Spindle Lane and the immediate vicinity of the mysterious crime; but our exertions were not rewarded by the smallest discovery.

Such, then, were the extraordinary but inadequate data which were placed in the hands of the London investigators, and upon which they very naturally based a wholly erroneous theory.

This was the condition of affairs upon the night of the 16th, when Harborne suddenly marched into my rooms, and unceremoniously deposited a dripping leather case, bearing the initials J. B. S., in my fender.

"Any news?" I cried, springing up.

"Not likely to be!" he answered. "You might almost think these detectives have assumed all along that they are dealing with a case of the supernatural, and have, in consequence, overlooked cer-

tain clues which, had the circumstances been less bizarre, they would have instantly followed up."

"You have some theory then? What is in this bag?"

There was that in Harborne's manner which I could not altogether fathom as he evasively replied:

"Leaving the bag for a moment, let me just place the facts before you as they really are, and not as they appear to be. I must confess that, last night, I was more than half inclined to agree with the detectives; and it is eminently probable that but for one thing I should now be in complete agreement with the other investigators—who believe that some huge and unknown insect entered the laboratory and bore away the Professor! When I left you and Doctor Davidson yesterday morning I immediately went in search of Jamieson, and found him—three-parts intoxicated. As you have probably heard, he has since become wholly so, and the detectives have utterly failed to extract a sane word from him. In this respect, therefore, I was first in the field; and from him I obtained the one additional clue needed. About one a.m.—an hour after Brayme-Skepley had entered the laboratory—Jamieson came to the

door of his lodge, and saw a light in the end house of Spindle Lane."

"But surely the police have questioned all the tenants in Spindle Lane?"

"The end house is empty."

"Have they examined it?"

"Certainly. But they merely did so as a matter of form: they had no *particular* reason for doing so. As a result they found nothing. What there was to find I had found before their arrival on the scene."

"I am afraid I don't altogether follow."

"Wait a minute. When I extracted from the porter the fact that he had seen a light in this house, the entire affair immediately assumed a different aspect. The key to the mystery was in my hands. I went round into Spindle Lane, and surveyed the end house from the front. It was evidently empty, for the ground floor windows were almost without glass.

"As I did not want to take anyone into my confidence at this stage of the proceedings it was impracticable to apply for the key, but upon passing round to the north I found that there was a back door with three stone steps leading up from the water's edge. I looked about for some means of gaining these steps—for I did

not wish to excite attention by getting out a college boat. In the end I jumped for it. I got off badly from the muddy ground, for the rain was coming down in torrents, but, nevertheless, I landed on the bottom step—off which I promptly shot into the river!

"As I was already drenched to the skin this mattered little, and, notwithstanding my condition, a thrill of gratification warmed me on finding the door to be merely latched. Just as a party of six which had been scouring the east valley appeared upon the opposite bank I entered, and shut the door behind me."

"Well—what then?"

"I went up to the room overlooking the laboratory—for, although no one seems to have attached any particular importance to the circumstance, from the window of this room you could, if the lab. window were bigger, easily spring through."

"And what did you find there?"

"The origin of the mysterious light."

"Which was?"

"A match! Now, you will agree with me that green spiders do not use matches. Inference: That some human being had been in the room on the night of the murder, and had struck a match, which had been ob-

served by Jamieson. There were also certain marks which considerably mystified me at first. On the thick grime of the window-ledge—inside—it was evident that a board had been, for some reason, placed across the room. The mortar had fallen off the wall in one corner, and here I found on the floor an impression as though a box had stood on end there—evidently to support the other extremity of the board. My next discovery was even more interesting. I found traces of finger marks—which, by the way, I removed before leaving—on the sill and around the inside of the window-frame. Someone had come in by the window!

“But I remembered that, until I opened it to investigate, the window had been closed. Therefore the mysterious visitor had closed it behind him. Since his bloodstained finger marks testified to the state of his hands on entering, how had he opened the window from outside—a somewhat difficult operation—and yet left no traces upon the sash? for there were none. I assumed, by way of argument, that he had opened the window from the inside.

“I had now constructed a hypothetical assassin who had got into the end house in

Spindle Lane, entered the bacteriological laboratory, murdered the Professor, returned through the window, and struck a match—for there were traces of blood upon it. Why had he come back to the room, and by what means had he reached the window of the laboratory? It was upon subsequently examining the laboratory (for the local officer in charge, being an acquaintance, raised no objection to my doing so) that two points became clear. First: That the window could never have been opened from outside. Second: The probability that a plank had been placed across—the same plank that had been used for some other mysterious purpose!

“Working, then, upon this theory, it immediately became evident that a plank could only have been placed in position from one of the windows. Here I had an enlightening inspiration. My assassin must have entered the house from the riverside, as I had done! How had he conveyed the plank into the place? A boat! You will mark that this was all pure supposition. Nevertheless, I determined, for the moment, to assume that a plank had been used.

“It was with this idea before me that I made my examination of the laboratory, and the

various facts, viewed in this new light, began to assume their proper places. The horrible marks, suggestive of an incredible assailant, which so horrified us when we first observed them, were less inexplicable when regarded as *intentional* and not accidental! To consider the handmark upon the ceiling, for example, as incidental to a struggle for life, pointed to an opponent possessing attributes usually associated with insects; but it was the easiest thing in the world for a tall man, standing upon a table, to imprint such a mark! This startling revelation, taken in conjunction with the locked door and the impossibility of anyone entering the place from the quadrangle, brought me face to face with a plausible solution of the mystery.

"The elaborate nature of the affair pointed to premeditation, and the fact that the missing man had locked the door was most significant. Who could have known that he would be there upon this particular night, and why had he failed to unlock the door? For you will remember that the key was in the lock. Then, again, how did it come about that his cries for assistance did not arouse the people living in Spindle Lane?

"These ideas carried me to the second stage of my theory,

and I assumed that a plank had been placed in position for the purpose of exit from, and not of entrance to, the laboratory! My final conclusion was as follows:

"Professor Brayme-Skepley entered the end house in Spindle Lane from a boat—which he obtained at Long's boathouse—bearing a plank and some kind of box or case. The plank he placed from window to window, the case upon the floor of the house in the Lane. He then returned to his boat, and landed beside the house. Entering the quadrangle, as we know, he went into the laboratory, and locked the door. His next proceeding was to smash everything breakable, wrench the window from its fastenings, and imprint the weird tracks and marks which proved so misleading. The book beneath the skylight and the lancet in the woodwork were the artistic touches of a man of genius. By this time it was close upon one o'clock, and, desirous of ascertaining whether his apparatus for bringing about the spider illusion was ready for instant use, he crawled from window to window. It was his match that Jamieson saw from the lodge door, and had Jamieson been a man of mettle the whole plot must have failed.

"He then, probably, grew

very impatient whilst awaiting the coming of Jamieson, but he heard him ultimately, and lay in the light of the lamps as we have heard. All fell out as he had planned. Jamieson climbed on to the dust-box and looked into the laboratory; then he ran for the window ladder, as a reasoning mind would have easily foreseen he would do. The professor, during his absence, broke the lamps, climbed along his plank, and pulled it after him."

I had listened with breathless interest so far, but I now broke in: "How about the spider?"

"Perfectly simple!" answered Harborne. "Allow me."

He reached down for the leather case and unstrapped it. From within he took... a magic-lantern!

"What!" I exclaimed. "A magic-lantern?"

"With cinematograph attachment! Here, you see, is the film—not improved by having been in the river. Some kind of South American spider, is it not?—beautifully coloured and on a black ground. The plank, supported upon the window-ledge and the upturned case, did duty for a table, and as Jamieson went up the ladder, and surveyed the place from the south-east, this was directed from the window of the end house across the few interven-

ing yards of Spindle Lane and through the open laboratory window on to the north-west corner of the wall.

"The beam from the lens would be hidden by the partition and only the weird image visible from the porter's point of view—though had he mounted further up the ladder and glanced over the wall he must have observed the ray of light across the lane. The familiar illuminated circle, usually associated with such demonstrations, was ingeniously eliminated by having a *transparent* photograph on an *opaque* ground. The Professor then retreated to the back door and hauled up his boat by the painter—which he would, of course, have attached there. He pulled upstream to return his boat and to sink his apparatus. He was probably already disguised—his fur coat would have concealed this from Jamieson."

I stared at Harborne in very considerable amazement.

"You are apparently surprised," he said with a smile; "but there is really nothing very remarkable in it all. I have not bored you with all the little details that led to the conclusion, nor related how I suffered a second ducking in leaving the end house; but my solution was no more than a

plausible hypothesis until a happy inspiration, born of nothing more palpable than my own imaginings, led me to search for and find the cinematograph. You are about to ask where I found it: I answer, in the deep hole above Long's boat-house where Jimmy Baker made his big catch last summer. Brayme-Skepley, being a man of very high reasoning powers, would, I argued, deposit it *up* and not down-stream, knowing that the river would be dragged. He would furthermore put it in the hole, so that the current should not carry it below college.

"There are, however, still one or two points that need clearing up. As to the blood, that offered no insurmountable difficulty to a physiologist; and, by Jove!" He suddenly plunged his hand into the case. . . . "This rubber ring from a soda-water bottle, ingeniously mounted upon a cane handle, accounts for the mysterious tracks. The point to which I particularly allude is the object of the professor's disappearance."

"I think," I said, "that I can offer a suggestion. He found, too late to withdraw, that his famous theory had a flaw in it, and could devise no less elaborate means of hiding the fact and at the same time of so destroying his apparatus as to leave no trace whereby his great reputation could be marred."

"That is my own idea," agreed Harborne. "For which reason I have carefully covered such very few tracks as he left, and have decided that this handsome case, with its tell-tale inscription—J. B. S.—must be destroyed. My conclusions are not for the world, which is at perfect liberty to believe that Brayme-Skepley was carried off by an unclassified aptera!"

Somewhere, with a new name and we hope a new conscience, the redoubtable Professor Brayme-Skepley is pursuing a new career, with presumably, a new set of ethics as his guidepost. To Harborne, the world is entitled to its opinions as to his vanishing.

And if they happen to be nightmares. . .

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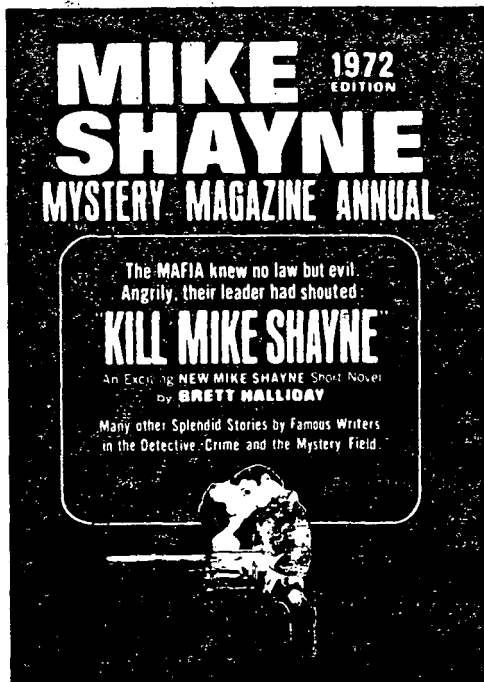
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*Up in the Bronx, the queen of the harlots lay cold in death, a cord around her neck. Down in the tenderloin a web of nameless evil began to unfold, as stool pigeons sang and vice lords sweated. Soon the world was to ask a question unanswered to this day:*

# WHO KILLED VIVIAN GORDON?

by DAVID MAZROFF



VIVIAN GORDON, a notorious, cunning and attractive vice queen with the morals and ethics of an alley cat, wrote a letter on February 8, 1931, to Isador Kressel, one of the bright boys of the Appellate Divisions's committee that was investigating municipal scandals and vice in Manhattan. In doing so, she started a chain of events which led to her brutal murder.

Vivian's snitch letter to Isador Kressel declared that she had "some information in connection with a frame-up by a police officer and others,

which I believe, will be of great aid to your committee in its work. I would appreciate an interview at your earliest convenience," she finished. And that was her death sentence.

An assistant to Isador Kressel named Irving Ben Cooper answered Vivian Gordon's letter, advising her that "Your letter addressed to Mr. Kressel has been turned over to me for attention. I should be glad to see you at the above address on Friday, February 20, 1931, between the hours of 10 A.M. and 5 P.M."

Another INCREDIBLE TRUE CRIME Masterpiece



On the date set for her appointment with Irving Ben Cooper, the attractive vice queen went to Room 542 in the County Courts Building, which was known as the headquarters of the Appellate Division's committee, and there told her story of the frame-up. Considering the fact that she was neck deep in her own little rackets—vice, theft, and extortion—the bums of Broadway controlling Manhattan's various dodges, deadfalls, grifts, and other little nefarious dealings involving such cute capers as shakedown, mayhem and murder, looked upon her singing session with glum eyes.

As a matter of fact, some of them were more than little incensed over it and spoke harshly of Miss Gordon's character. It wasn't that she was mixed up with any of the boys because actually she was just a small time operator, an independent, but her singing to the committee brought heat and heat—was something guys like Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond, Lucky Luciano, Lepke Buchalter and the other boys didn't want.

Vivian related a story to Mr. Cooper which raised his eyebrows. She declared that she had been framed on a charge of prostitution by her former husband, John Bischoff, and a

vice squad cop named Andrew J. McLaughlin, and that as a result of this frame she was committed to the Bedford Reformatory in 1923, an abode not in keeping with her distinct tastes in living quarters.

Irving Ben Cooper's legal mind told him the mere word of a known harlot would not be sufficient to indict a mouse that had pilfered a piece of cheese from a trap, and told Vivian to bring back proof that would corroborate her story, corroboration being necessary in order to convict in the State of New York. Vivian set out to obtain the necessary corroboration.

The morning of February 26, six days after the redheaded hustler made her accusations to Irving Ben Cooper, was cold. A winter wind blew over the bare trees in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx and shook the branches so they wailed through the silence in a lamentable song. The snow eddied up into the blistering wind and disappeared into the deserted spaces.

From Mosholu Parkway a lone figure, a workman named Harry Francis, plodded along, his head down as he groped his way through the wind and snow-driven path. Something, one of those unaccountable urges which so often grow out

of vague premonitions, made him look up and toward the right. At first, he wasn't certain he had really seen the thing his eyes told him was there.

He looked again, and his heart increased its beat and he was struck with an awesome fear. Lying face up in the snow was the body of a woman, her frozen form exposed to the waist and revealing pink silk step-ins, sheer hose held up by two wide pink garters, one foot encased in a black, suede pump, the right foot shoeless. Her black velvet dress, trimmed with cream-colored lace and obviously expensive, was soiled and wet with snow. She wore no coat, and there was no sign of one, and her face, dead-white and cold, was frozen into an expression of a poignant agony, as if she realized at the last moment that her life was being taken and all her regret surged into this, her last reaction, her last sorrow.

Harry Francis let out an involuntary cry and hurried from the park to the Bathgate police station. It was a little before seven when he arrived there and in labored words told the sergeant on duty at the desk of his discovery.

It was no more than ten minutes later that detectives arrived on the scene, and shortly afterward that news-



VIVIAN GORDON

paper men and photographers arrived and stared with mixed emotions at the dead woman. She was lying in a small ravine about a dozen feet from Mosholu Parkway, her auburn hair coated with snow that had partially congealed into ice, her face, even in death, showing traces of rare beauty, her figure slim her waist small, her bosom full, her legs long and shapely. She could have been thirty or thirty-five. A detective bent and touched the rope that was tied tightly around her throat, a piece of clothes line about six feet long.

"Strangled!" the detective said. "A dirty way to die."

Photographers snapped pictures and reporters made notes on pieces of folded newsprint paper.

"A first-degree murder this," the same detective said. He turned to his fellow police officers. "Any of you men know her?" he asked. No one did. He turned to the newspaper men and photographers. "How about you boys? Ever see her before?" One newspaper man thought she looked familiar but couldn't recall where he had seen her or under what circumstances. The body was taken to the morgue, and the area where she had lain roped off and a uniformed policeman stationed there to keep pedestrians or possible curiosity seekers away until the ground had been thoroughly gone over for clues.

The medical examiner reported that death had occurred five or more hours previously and was due to strangulation. There had been no criminal assault upon her person. He further reported that the dead woman had been a prostitute.

Inspector Henry E. Bruckman, chief of the Bronx detective force, ordered her prints taken and the records searched. If she had been a working prostitute the chances

were good that she had been picked up once or more times and that her prints would be on file in the identification bureau. While the fingerprint boys were working on that angle other detectives searched the vicinity where the dead woman's body was found. There was no sign of a struggle anywhere and this led the detectives to the conclusion that she had been slain elsewhere, probably in a car, driven to the park and tossed from the vehicle. The belief was strengthened when a detective found the missing shoe some hundred feet from where the body was found. The shoe thus had been dropped or fell from her foot as she was being carried into the park.

The fingerprint boys matched up the dead woman's prints and learned she was Vivian Gordon, a known prostitute and madam who had been suspected of shakedowns and extortions and whose last known address was an apartment at 156 East Thirty-seventh Street. The record disclosed that she had pulled a short stretch in the Bedford Reformatory in 1923. In a short time detectives were in Vivian's apartment, and several minutes afterward Police Commissioner Edward P. Mulrooney arrived, and after him came District Attorney Charles B.

McLaughlin, a brilliant lawyer and devoted public servant and no relation to the cop whom Vivian Gordon had named in her alleged frame.

"This was a particularly vicious killing," Mulrooney said. "I'm going after the man or men who committed this crime, and I want no stone left unturned until the killer or killers are strapped in the chair."

District Attorney McLaughlin felt the same way. The two assigned their best men to the case, among them being Chief Inspector John J. Sullivan, Inspector John A. Lyons, Inspector Bruckman, Captain Richard F. Oliver, and several other top police officers. The highly efficient law enforcement machine of New York was set in motion with the naming of these men to handle the investigation.

The superintendent, janitor, elevator operator, and several residents of the building were questioned. From these it was learned that Vivian had left her apartment some time between 11:15 and 11:30 the night before. She had left alone, and she was wearing her expensive brown mink coat.

"I'm sure she wore it," William Wheaton, the elevator operator, said. "I took her

down. She wore the coat, all right. I'm sure of it."

Where had she gone? Whom had she met? Why was she killed? Three provocative questions. The officers made a minute search of the apartment, scrutinized her clothes and personal belongings, hoping to get a line from these as to the kind of life she had led.

Her clothing was expensive, as were her colognes and perfumes. They went through her desk drawers and bureau drawers, found letters, bills, memos of one kind and another, and two diaries. District Attorney McLaughlin and Commissioner Mulrooney studied the diaries and the three memorandum books that were uncovered. In the next several hours they had a fairly large and clear picture of Vivian Gordon, the woman and the courtesan.

Vivian, they learned, was thirty-eight years old when she was slain. She had been born in Michigan City, Indiana, as Benita Franklin. Her parents were middle-class and respectable. McLaughlin and Mulrooney kept digging, aided by their expert subordinates, and before too long they knew almost everything about the murdered redhead who had chosen to walk a crimson path through life.

When still in her early teens Vivian exhibited the traces of harsh wildness which later characterized her. She ran around with older boys and stayed out until all hours of the night. She rebelled against her parents' restrictions and when they couldn't do anything with her they sent her away to a convent in Canada.

She tried to run away several times, and several times she attempted suicide, twice by slashing her wrists. She was taken out of the convent and returned home. The time-enchanted domains which lay beyond the reaches of her smalltown home intrigued Vivian's senses.

She was, she told herself, a big city girl. When she was eighteen years old she ran away to Chicago, took jobs as a waitress, chorus girl, dice girl and barmaid. Her auburn hair and lush young figure attracted men and they made a play for her.

She didn't refuse too many of them, and before long she realized she was in possession of a commodity that could be sold as easily as given away. She moved on from Chicago after clipping a sucker for his bankroll while he lay asleep, stupefied. She went to Jersey City, then to Atlantic City, and from there to Jacksonville,

Florida, back to Jersey City, and then to New York. Once again she worked as a waitress, chorus girl, bar maid and as a comedian's foil in burlesque houses. Whenever she could she clipped a sucker by getting him drunk and staying with him in a cheap hotel until he passed out.

At twenty-three Vivian married John C. Bischoff, a thin, personable man, and out of this union was born a daughter who was named Benita after her mother. At this time Vivian had not yet assumed the name by which she was to become known as a prostitute, madam, knockout drop artist and extortionist.

Bischoff learned after his marriage that his wife had some rather peculiar ideas about fidelity and marriage vows and sued for divorce, obtaining it after Vivian's conviction as a prostitute. It is likely that he may have set her up in order to obtain his divorce, but it was never proved.

He moved to Lorton, Virginia, where he became a prison official. Benita, a sensitive, wide-eyed and pretty young girl, committed suicide after the newspapers printed their series of stories concerning her mother's murder and way of life.

While separated from her husband and before the divorce,



Vivian assumed her alias. She was a strikingly handsome woman, exuded sex like an orchard gives off the scent of its fruit. She played the smaller hotels and the district around Times Square.

She was clever, hard, utterly without emotion or qualm when it came to separating a John from his money. After a score she would stay away from the area in which she had made the pickup until she was sure in her own mind any heat which might be on her had died down. She had learned early that suckers beef.

She did fairly well for the first two years but not well enough for her because she had big ideas. She had become known to many bellhops in the better class hotels, to a few taxi drivers whom she instructed to send only the top tricks to her, and to most of the speakeasy bartenders in the Fifties. A year later she moved into the apartment she occupied when she was taken for her last ride.

She took in two girls from time to time who worked from her apartment and split their take with her. When they moved on she would take on two other girls and thus became a call-house madam on a small scale, but not on a small scale in money, for she taught the girls her modus operandi.



"An out-of-town guy on the town, especially if he's married; can't beef," she told the girls. "Those are the suckers we'll take."

There were a lot of angles she didn't tell her girls about, because she wanted to keep them for herself, and these included shaking down many of her out-of-town clients after they returned to their home cities. She would write them nice, congenial little notes complaining mildly that they had done some damage to a rug, to the upholstery on her divan, to a drape, and asking, in apologetic language, if they wouldn't be good enough to send her a hundred dollars or two hundred dollars, whatever the amount she thought she could get, to cover the cost of the damage. She never failed to collect.

Being a clever woman, she knew that in order to attract the big money she had to look and act like big money. She schooled herself well. She was always fashionably turned out, always clean, even to the point of delicacy, was well read, and could converse in drawing room language on the arts, books, the theater, food, perfumes, or the latest scandal among the elite of society, or what producer was sleeping with what movie star or starlet. She could also, if the occasion demanded, curse like a drunken sailor. Many a bellhop and taxi driver learned that to his sorrow when he tried to pull a fast one on her.

The whole fabric of her life, its dark patterns, gaudiness, tinsel, its frost-hardened sweeps of shakedowns and extortions, the strange, grim and barren compost of countless acts of prostitution and of pandering the bodies of other women, some of them still in their late teens, came before the skilled and searching minds of Commissioner Mulrooney and District Attorney McLaughlin.

She wasn't a good woman. She was, indeed, a dreary and sorry specimen of womanhood. But whether she was good or bad wasn't the point. She had been murdered by someone who now was walking the streets of the city, or was lying

low in an apartment, or out drinking in some speakeasy, secure in the thought that he had gotten away with murder. That was the point, the only point, and the job of the police department was to apprehend him and the district attorney's job to convict him and send him to the chair.

IN THE SEARCH of her effects Commissioner Mulrooney came across the letter written to Vivian by Irving Ben Cooper. A check with Cooper gave the police and the district attorney information that Vivian had intended to testify in the vice investigation, specifically about her alleged frame to prison by Andrew J. McLaughlin and her former husband.

The detectives on the case learned that McLaughlin had sailed for Bermuda three days before the murder. A talk with Bischoff convinced detectives that he was in the clear. Eventually McLaughlin was cleared. Newspaper men learned that Vivian was to have been a witness in the vice investigation and concluded that the police had killed her in order to keep her from testifying. It was recalled that Police Lieutenant Charles Becker had been convicted of ordering the murder of Herman Rosenthal, a Broad-

way gambler, who was to testify about payoffs to Becker and other cops. Lieutenant Becker and four East Side toughies carrying the monikers of Whitey Lewis, Dago Frank, Lefty Louie and Gyp The Blood, went to the chair for that caper. The newspaper boys had a field day. So did the reading public. And Vivian Gordon became a household word. However, she had to give up her life to achieve it, to die under a grey winter sky, her half-clad body thrown like a piece of refuse into a dirty gully.

Commissioner Mulrooney, District Attorney McLaughlin, Inspector John J. Sullivan and Inspector John A. Lyons finished studying Vivian's diaries. Under the date of February 12, 1929, was the following entry:

"Did not start this diary for reason other than to remind me of dates but think—*advisedly* so—that it's best to put down things as they happen concerning John A. Radeloff, he is not to be trusted—he would stoop to anything."

John A. Radeloff, the authorities learned, was an attorney and lived in Brooklyn. He was a short, stocky man, smooth and glib, and resembled a great deal the movie version of a gangster. He had handled

all of Vivian's business, acted as her attorney in the administration of some property she had purchased on Long Island.

The four men studying her diaries noted all the entries made which referred to Radeloff. On February 13, 1929, Vivian made this entry:

"John A. Radeloff here "finale" between us. Refused to pay Dr.'s bill. Phoned his mother and wife. If anything happens to me—he is to blame—he has henchmen. Don't know when I go to the hospital—reckon as soon as J.A.R. gives me money for Dr. etc."

A few weeks later this notation was recorded in her diary:

"The threat has been made—Sam Cohen, who is a client of J.A.R. in a case—has brought the thugs (2) to J.A.R.'s office—so J.A.R. told me and he refused to let them do the trick? How did they know (?) J. and I had a scrap unless he told Sam Cohen and why make a confidant out of a common loft thief?"

Vivian followed this up with:

"The above information was conveyed to me in my apt. after a reconciliation on February 23, but still I list this information in case his man is according to his statement

supposed to have said, 'We'll take her out somewhere. No one will know what happened to her. Every identification will be missing, especially that ring,' meaning the \$2,500 ring I wear."

These notations indicated that Vivian Gordon knew she was marked for murder two years before she was slain. Furthermore, the manner in which she was slain was identical to the way she had written she was to die!

Other entries in the diary concerning Radeloff pointed the finger at him as the man directly responsible for her murder. They follow in the order in which she had written them down.

"J.A.R. here—again hinted about my getting killed, saying, 'I'd better get my collars and shirts out of here. If you should be killed they'd look for me.' There is \$18,000 in mortgages of mine in his office.

"John A. Radeloff office \$500—not show up—waited 7½ hours. Phoned him home—went over there—had it out with him—met him as he and wife were going out for a walk. Read the riot act to him and she didn't say a word. Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!

"Radeloff said Sam Cohen had been in to see him within the past week. Sam Cohen is

the one who was to have knocked me off last winter. I guess J.A.R. is seeking his services now for that deed.

"J.A.R. is the only one who is really an enemy of mine—because of certain things I have told his wife in retaliation for all the rotten things he had done to me—he was just using me for a good thing. Treating me half civil—a necessary evil—as it were—because he knew that he could borrow money from me—besides—I have a mortgage of \$11,300 due to close Oct. 30. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if he'd try to grab that money as there is no one close to me to put up a squawk if anything occurred. Anything I have done to him he deserves 100% more."

That was the end of that series of entries concerning Radeloff. There were other names in the diaries, men in town, men from out of town, customers, and the police set out to question each one, sending men out of town to talk with those who lived outside of New York. Other detectives made the rounds of known hoodlum hangouts, questioned stoolies, picked up known criminals in their dragnet, grilled them as to their whereabouts on the night of February 26. John Radeloff, police were certain, didn't kill

Vivian Gordon but, as she had written in her diary, he had her killed, and the police wanted her killers. They grilled every known criminal with a zealotness which shook up the hoods. No one knew anything.

John A. Radeloff was picked up and brought to Vivian's apartment for questioning.

It was a psychological move, this quizzing of Radeloff in the apartment, but Radeloff laughed it off. He scoffed at the accusations and ridiculed the entries in Vivian's diary as the "writings of a paranoiac prostitute." Of course he handled Vivian's business, was close to her. Why not? He was her attorney. Arguments? Disagreements? Certainly. Lawyers and their clients often differed. Where was he on the night of February 26? He and his wife spent the evening with friends, the entire evening, before, during, and after the hour given as the time of murder.

District Attorney McLaughlin said, "Radeloff, I know you didn't kill Vivian Gordon. You're too slick for that. And I don't think you've got the guts to pull a trigger. Your alibi is solid enough, too. You weren't on the murder scene. But you might just as well have been, and you might just as well have pulled the trigger, because you hired the killers."



Radeloff smirked his reply. "Lock him up," McLaughlin ordered.

Radeloff started to protest. "Take him out of here!" McLaughlin snapped. "He stinks!"

Sam Cohen, known as "Chowder Head" to the police, was brought in next. He had a record as a loft burglar. He had a large head and a beefy face, a big body. He, too, had an alibi.

"I ain't a killer," Cohen wailed. "I'm a loft burglar. You ain't gonna pin this beef on me. I ain't had nothin' to do with it."

"Maybe you didn't, Chowder Head," McLaughlin told

him, "but you know a hell of a lot more than you're telling us. I'm going to lock you up and keep you locked up until you decide to tell us a little more."

Radeloff and Cohen were held under high bail while both protested vigorously. Police learned, in the meantime, that an expensive diamond wrist-watch and diamond ring were also missing in addition to the mink coat. They found bills and receipts of payment from the stores where the jewelry and coat had been purchased. They went to the stores and obtained complete descriptions of the articles. The information was relayed to pawnshops and buyers of second-hand furs and jewelry. The hunt was getting warm.

The autopsy report revealed another interesting fact. Vivian had eaten dinner and drank liquor prior to being murdered. Knowing her for what she had been, the detectives believed she would have dined in a speakeasy. Several detectives were sent out to comb the speakeasies in an effort to learn if she had dined with someone, a man or two men, on the evening before she met death. Close attention was also given the clothes-line that was used to strangle her. It was an old and dirty piece of clothes-line which obviously had been in use for

some time to hang laundry. The checking of the manufacturer, the store to whom it was sold by the distributor, and finally the customer who bought it, loomed as a hopeless task but the police decided to do it anyway.

The investigation went on, day by day, each hour around the clock, but nothing new was added that would bring about a solution. The newspapers, aware that the murder was a hot case, kept throwing harpoons at the police department the while they also offered their own theories on the murder. One of their theories included Vannie Higgins, Brooklyn beer czar. Vannie was a tough nut, a guy with a hair-trigger temper. When he read that he was being considered as a suspect in the murder he blew his top.

He rode into the Bronx, at the risk of a gun fight with Dutch Schultz, who controlled the Bronx and wouldn't have appreciated the presence of Higgins in his territory even if it were for the purpose of insulting a few cops. Higgins came well surrounded by several of his henchmen. He strode into the Bronx police station, told the inspector in charge what he thought about the veiled hints concerning his connection with Vivian Gordon and strode out again. From

there he went before the grand jury hearing evidence in the case. His sharp, brittle-toned words were hurled at the grand jury. They were glad to see him leave.

Pressed for a statement by reporters, who saw in Higgins an opportunity to write a good story, the explosive gangster said, "I didn't tell 'em nothin'—and damned little of that! I don't play around with them Broadway tarts. I leave 'em to the guys with soft heads!"

With Vannie Higgins out of the picture the newspapers next hinted that Legs Diamond knew something about the murder and that he had been a close friend of the slain woman. Legs shrugged the whole thing off with "I don't know anything about anything, including Vivian Gordon."

A WEEK WENT BY. The clothes-line couldn't be traced. The mink coat, diamond ring and wrist-watch hadn't appeared in a pawnshop or in any of the stores dealing in second-hand furs and jewelry. The speakeasies that had been checked proved equally disappointing. None of the operators, waiters or bartenders could recall having seen Vivian on the night before she was murdered or on any other

night. The men listed in Vivian's diaries turned out to be no more than customers, all innocent, all willing to tell what they knew, which was nothing. John A. Radeloff and Sam Cohen were still being held in jail under high bail, and all moves to free them on writs of habeas corpus were blocked by District Attorney McLaughlin.

The police meanwhile had learned a great deal more of Vivian's life and decided to go over her diaries again in the hope of finding a new clue. They were certain Radeloff fitted into the picture of the murder. Vivian had given him a hard time, badgered, insulted and dunned him for the money he owed her, and he wasn't the kind to take all that from her because he despised her and was using her. Since he couldn't avoid her, or avoid paying her, he chose to have her killed. That was the police theory.

"He's guilty as sin!" Mulrooney said to McLaughlin as the two men were studying the diaries. "He's a skunk. He used that woman in the same way a pimp would have used her. I'd like to push him into the electric chair!"

"We'll get him," McLaughlin assured the commissioner.

The study of the diaries disclosed that Vivian had loaned \$1,500 to a man named



Charles Reuben. Beside the name and amount listed was the word "Oslo." In another entry, made months after the first one, which recorded the loan, was the same \$1,500, only this time it was beside the name "Harry Saunders." Other notations showed that the debt was still unpaid, and since all other loans listed in the diaries had been marked as paid, Commissioner Mulrooney and District Attorney McLaughlin came to the conclusion that Saunders and Reuben were one and the same man.

They checked out every man in New York named Saunders and Reuben. No dice. They decided then that the notation "Oslo" might mean Oslo, Norway, and that the money had been loaned to Reuben for a trip to Oslo. A crew of detectives checked all the passenger lists of ships that had sailed at about the time of the entry Vivian had made in her diary.

On the passenger list of the ship *S.S. Bergenfjord*, which had sailed from New York to Norway on July 20, 1929, there appeared the name of Charles Reuben! Furthermore, the passenger list disclosed that a man named Sam Cohen had shared the same stateroom with Reuben.

The next check made was with the government for the

handwriting of the men when they signed for their passports. Comparisons of the signatures showed that the Sam Cohen held with John Radeloff was not the same man who had sailed with Reuben. The similarity of name was a coincidence. Further checks in the identification bureau of the police department brought out a startling fact. Harry Reuben's handwriting showed a marked resemblance to that of a known hood named Harry Stein. And Stein, the file disclosed, had a record as a strangler!

In 1916, Stein was held as a deserter from the army. In 1918, he was charged with grand larceny and received a suspended sentence. Again in 1918, he was arrested for petty larceny and received another suspended sentence but was charged with violation of probation on his previous suspended sentence and ordered to jail. In March 1921, Stein was burglarizing an apartment in the Bronx when the woman who lived there came home unexpectedly. Stein attempted to strangle her. He received ten years for this beef, served six years in Sing Sing and was paroled. He was listed as the prime suspect.

Commissioner Mulrooney ordered Stein tailed around the clock and assigned teams of



detectives on a continuous three-shift relay.

"I want you to get up with him in the morning and put him to bed every night," Mulrooney said. "I want to know the name of every man and woman with whom he communicates or even nods to in passing. He'll make his contact sooner or later. He has to."

While the detectives were tailing Stein around the city, Mulrooney and McLaughlin learned that the ex-con had been represented by John Radeloff in a criminal case. Things were looking up. The reports on Stein's activities and daily meanderings came in, and Mulrooney and McLaughlin gave them a close study. There was a pattern to his movements which told them he could be *the* man, and both Mulrooney and McLaughlin grew excited as they read the reports.

Stein left his apartment at 1312 Park Avenue each day about 1:30 in the afternoon. He would walk to Times Square on good days and in inclement weather took a cab there. He knew a lot of hoods in Manhattan and stopped to pass the time of day with them. Each time he spoke to one of these characters a tail was put on the man with whom he had talked. Each of these men was checked out as to his where-

abouts and activities on the night of the murder.

One of the places Stein visited frequently was a Roumanian restaurant on Sixth Avenue. It was a run-down joint where the patrons played cards for small stakes. In this restaurant the detectives saw Stein talk with an ex-con named Sam Greenberg who had a long police record. A trio of sleuths was put on Greenberg.

Several days after his first meeting with Greenberg in the Roumanian restaurant Stein went into a telephone booth in a cigar store and called a number. When he got his number he asked for "Harry."

Harry wasn't home. Stein hung up and left. The detective who had listened in on the call traced the telephone number and found it to be an apartment in a building located at 300 West 49th Street occupied by a man who was listed as Harry Harvey. The building was placed under surveillance.

Harry Harvey soon put in an appearance and the detectives shadowing him saw that he was a man of medium height, well built, sneaky in his movements, his wide mouth and heavy lips working in an habitual nervousness. Greenberg, Harvey and Stein, police learned, had no visible means of support. They were typical Broadway hustlers

willing to do anything but work for a buck. The reports on them interested Mulrooney and McLaughlin a great deal, and the two ordered wire taps placed on the telephones of the three men. And then came the break in the case, and it came as such breaks often come, in a telephone call to Mulrooney from a man who insisted on remaining anonymous—"For my own protection. These guys would kill me if they ever found out I had talked." Mulrooney promised to keep his name confidential.

The caller gave Mulrooney three names. They were David Buttermann, a jobber of miscellaneous goods, who lived at 215 West 75th Street. William Rosenfeld, brother-in-law of Buttermann, a dealer in diamonds, who lived at the Edison Hotel in Times Square. And Max Mishkin, a dressmaker whose business establishment was at 2228 Broadway.

Mulrooney called in three teams of detectives, told them of what he had learned.

"Rosenfeld and Buttermann," Mulrooney said, "have been reported to me as having seen Harry Stein with Vivian Gordon's mink coat, diamond wrist watch and diamond ring." He paused. "He was seen with them a few hours after Vivian's body was found. Max Mishkin

was approached by Buttermann the night of the murder and asked to give an appraisal on Vivian's mink coat. These three men represent the key to the solution of this crime. You know what you have to do. Go ahead."

The big mystery of the attractive courtesan's murder, a murder which had occupied the front pages of the newspapers each day since it occurred, slowly began to unravel. There weren't any big-time gangsters involved in it. She hadn't been killed to silence her because her intended testimony before the committee would have brought heat on the vice syndicate in the city. She hadn't been killed by McLaughlin the cop, nor by her husband, both of whom she hated for the belief that they had framed her into prison. The men and women involved were low rate characters, creeps, the most sleazy kind of hoods who would steal from one another and kill a good friend for a price.

They moved in a little world tainted with the acid of deceit, with the darkness of treachery and the double-cross. They could kill without passion, without rancor, with sudden and terrifying finality by the chilling means of the strong-arm or a rope twisted around the throat of a victim. They killed

in cowardly fashion, killed women and defenseless men.

David Butterman and his wife admitted everything almost immediately after the two detectives who called on them identified themselves and told the couple they were under suspicion of being involved in the Vivian Gordon murder.

Anna Butterman said, "I got a telephone call about two or two-thirty in the morning—" She hesitated then. "It was the morning that Vivian Gordon's body was found. It was Harry Stein, the man who called, I mean. He said he wanted to talk to Dave, my husband. We've known Harry for a couple of years. I told him Dave was sleeping but he said it was important so I woke Dave up and he went to the phone..."

One of the detectives looked toward David Butterman. The man picked up the thread of his wife's story. He was obviously nervous and obviously scared and his hands shook a little as he spoke.

"Stein told me," Butterman said, "that he wanted to see me in the morning, that he had something for me. I agreed to meet him. He named a restaurant on Broadway near Ninety-sixth Street. I met him there at nine o'clock. We had breakfast and then we went to a house on Riverside Drive. A

woman let us in and we went into the kitchen at the back of the house. Stein showed me a wrist watch. I looked it over and told him I wasn't interested in it."

"What else?" a detective asked.

"Then he brought out a mink coat," Butterman said.

"Describe it," the same detective said.

Butterman described it. It tallied with the description the police had of Vivian's coat.

"I tore the lining out of the coat," Butterman continued, "and then I asked Stein how much he wanted for the coat. He said, 'The boys are asking four hundred.'"

"Did he say who 'the boys' were?" the taller detective asked.

"No, he didn't."

"Did you know where the coat came from, whose it was?" the other detective asked.

"No, I didn't. Stein didn't say and I didn't ask him."

"Okay, go on."

"I took the coat and watch to the Edison Hotel and showed it to my brother-in-law, who's a dealer in jewelry."

"What's his name?" the taller detective asked.

"William Rosenfeld. He looked the watch over and said he wasn't interested in it. I left and went home, and a little

later Stein called and I told him Bill wasn't interested in the watch but would like to see the ring. He said he would get it and bring it over. A little while later he came with it. It was a good ring."

"Describe it," the taller detective said.

Butterman described it. The description fitted that of Vivian's ring. "Stein said he wanted a thousand dollars for it," Butterman went on. "I took it to my brother-in-law. He said he didn't want it, that the price was too high. I gave the ring back to Stein."

"What about the coat?" the shorter, heavier detective asked Butterman.

"I took the coat to Max Mishkin that evening—he's a dressmaker. My wife is a customer of Max's, that's why I took the coat to him. I asked him to appraise it. The next morning I checked the coat in a Times Square checking place. I gave the check to Stein. I don't know what happened to it after that."

MEANWHILE the other detectives who had been sent out were quizzing Max Mishkin and William Rosenfeld. Their stories corroborated those of Butterman and his wife. The detectives who had interrogated the Buttermans went to the

house at 294 Riverside Drive immediately after they left the couple. Butterman had told them that after he ripped the lining from the coat he attempted to obliterate some markings from the coat with a brush and ink and spilled some ink on a couch cover over which the coat had been spread. The detectives wanted this cover as a piece of evidence.

The building at 294 Riverside Drive was a rooming house run by a woman named Madeline Tully. Mrs. Tully proved to be a hostile person when the two detectives called and refused to admit them.

"Lady, we're investigating a murder. If you don't want to get yourself into serious trouble," the taller detective said, "I'd advise you to talk to us. In there," he pointed.

She denied that Harry Stein had been at her house with David Butterman, or that she knew either Butterman or Stein. Then the shorter detective spied the couch cover. He picked it up.

"When Butterman was here," the shorter detective said, "he tried to erase some markings on the inside of the coat. He spilled some of the ink on a divan, on a cover. This is the cover, isn't it?" he asked and held it up. "How about it, Mrs. Tully? Or do you want to

go downtown and tell it to the D.A.?"

Mrs. Tully talked. She told the detectives that Harry Stein used to be a roomer in her house and that he still had a key. She admitted that he had been in the house with Butterman, that he had shown Butterman the coat and that the jobber had tried to obliterate the markings on the pelts after he had torn out the lining. They told her not to say anything to anyone, especially Stein, about their visit, and to stay at home in case they wanted to reach her. She agreed.

Sam Greenberg, Harry Stein's friend, had not yet been tied in with Stein or with the murder. However, he was still being tailed, as were Stein and Harvey. The detectives who had interrogated the Buttermans, Mrs. Tully, Rosenfeld and Mishkin brought their information to Mulrooney and McLaughlin who studied it at length and decided that it was time to make some arrests.

On the evening of April 8, Detective Raymond F. Henshaw, who had been stationed on the top floor of a building at 315 West 48th Street listening in on a wire tap which had been placed on the telephone in Harry Harvey's flat a block away heard a ring in his phones.

A woman answered the caller, a man, who asked for Harry.

"Just a minute," the woman said. Then Henshaw heard her talking to someone in the room. "It's for you, Harry."

"Hello," Harry said.

"It's Stein," the caller replied. "I've got some money for you. Where can I see you?" he asked him.

"Come on around. I'll be in the lobby. How soon can you be here?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"Okay, I'll meet you."

Henshaw hurried over to the apartment building and waited. Shortly afterward, Stein appeared. Henshaw saw him pass something to Harvey. It was the first time a detective on the case had been able to witness an actual contact and an actual exchange of money between any of the parties involved in the investigation of the murder. Henshaw returned to headquarters and related what he had heard and seen. His information decided Mulrooney and McLaughlin to move in and start making some arrests. A plan was worked out for simultaneous arrests of all the suspects. The next day teams of detectives rode out in squad cars to apprehend the three men. Greenberg, Harvey and Stein were picked up and brought downtown to Head-

quarters, all three men protesting the arrests.

The three men were grilled singly by detectives. They refused to admit anything, even in the face of the statements made by David and Anna Butterman, William Rosenfeld and Max Mishkin.

"I don't know nothin'!" Stein said and clammed up.

"Your former landlady puts you in her kitchen with Dave Butterman and Vivian Gordon's mink coat. How about that, Stein?" a detective shot at him.

"She's a bug," Stein replied, "a real psycho." He looked up at the detectives with a surly expression. "That's all I'm gonna say. I don't know nothin'!"

Greenberg was more polite but just as adamant.

"I didn't know Vivian Gordon," he said at one point in the questioning. "I never saw her in my life, dead or alive."

During the interrogation Greenberg admitted he had made the trip to Oslo and that he had sailed there under the name of Sam Cohen. He refused to say why he had used the alias or why he had gone to Norway.

Harry Harvey, insolent and arrogant, answered all questions with "You've got nothing on me. I don't know anything about the Vivian Gordon murder. I'm not a crook or a

hood, and I don't have a criminal record. This is the first time I've ever been arrested in my life."

All three men were locked up in separate cells. John Radeloff and Sam "Chowder Head" Cohen in the meantime had been released on writs. The police had to admit, at last, that they couldn't hold them further because they had nothing on them. They were certain Radeloff was behind the murder but they could prove nothing against him, nothing on which to hold him. The case against Stein was taken before the grand jury which indicted him on a charge of murder in the first degree. Mulrooney then decided to release Harvey and Greenberg.

"We've got nothing on you," the two were told. "You're free."

They no sooner had walked out of Headquarters when detectives started to tail them. Other detectives kept on checking into the background of the two men and their past activities. It was learned that Harry Harvey's real name was Harry Schlitten, and this discovery led to another break in the case. Checks of automobile rental agencies brought out the fact that a Harry Schlitten had hired a Cadillac limousine from the K & S Auto Renting

Company, 123 Suffolk Street at eight o'clock of the night before Vivian Gordon's body was found in Van Cortlandt Park. Detectives who questioned the attendants at the K & S Auto Renting Company were told that the car was returned at one o'clock in the morning, and that the picture of the man they had identified as Schlitten was the man who had rented the car. Schlitten had been accompanied by another man.

Detectives showed the attendants pictures of Stein and Greenberg. They said neither of the two men was the one who had been with Schlitten. They furnished a good description of the man, however.

Nothing happened in the next two weeks. Greenberg and Schlitten had played it cool, doing nothing which might attract suspicion. Mulrooney ordered his men to pick them up again for further questioning. They were subjected to sessions of hard grilling. Greenberg, a seasoned hood, merely sat in his chair and gave back blank stares to all questions put to him. Schlitten kept trying to talk his way out of the jam. Mulrooney decided that if any of the trio broke it would be Schlitten. He ordered the detectives to stay with him, to keep pounding at him, not to let up a single second. Relays of



detectives worked on him, all that day and during the entire evening, and for the entire night. And at last, just as dawn was breaking, Schlitten, in almost complete exhaustion, mumbled that he was willing to tell what he knew.

"Give me a cup of coffee and a cigarette," he said, "and a rest."

A detective went out and brought Schlitten a cup of coffee. Another detective gave him a cigarette. They waited tensely until he had finished his coffee and cigarette. When he did he told his story.

He had met Harry Stein about eight months ago, in the Roumanian restaurant where he had been a card dealer. Stein had introduced him to Sam Greenberg about three months afterward. The three of them teamed up and trimmed suckers in card games. On the day



before Vivian's body was discovered in the park Stein met him in the Roumanian restaurant and asked him if he knew where he could rent a car, some agency that wouldn't be too curious. Schlitten said he asked a friend of his named Izzy Lewis, who was in the restaurant at the time, if he knew of such an agency and Lewis recommended the place on Suffolk Street. Schlitten then told Stein of the place and asked him what he wanted with the car.

"I have to get a certain party out of the way or a friend of mind is going to wind up in jail," Stein answered.

Schlitten then said that Izzy Lewis accompanied him to the agency where they rented the car and then drove to Norfolk and Rivington Streets where they picked up Greenberg and Stein.

"After we picked up Greenberg and Stein," Schlitten said, "we drove to 49th Street and First Avenue, where I let Lewis out of the car. Lewis had a date to meet me after midnight. We were going to play some cards. After I let Lewis out Stein, who was sitting in the back seat with Greenberg, told me to drive to Park Avenue and One Hundredth Street. It was a short distance from where Stein lived. On the way he told me that I

was to get a grand or maybe two for my end. I still didn't know what they really were going to do or who they were going to do it to. When we got to where he told me to drive Stein got out and was gone about ten minutes. He had a package with him. He got into the back seat and unwrapped the package. I saw that he had a long piece of clothes-line. He gave it to Greenberg. Greenberg threw the line under the rear seat. Then Stein told me to drive to the Bronx.

"I want to find the right spot," Stein said.

"Stein saw the spot he was looking for in Van Cortlandt Park," Schlitten continued. "He told me to drive then to the 1600 block off Grand Avenue. When we got there Stein got out and told us to wait."

"Told you and Greenberg to wait?" a detective asked.

Schlitten nodded. "While Stein was gone, Greenberg said to me, 'When this party arrives with Stein I'll tell you to drive to Max's place. You drive down the hill. I'm supposed to be a chump with a couple hundred grand in diamonds. This party Stein is bringing is supposed to take me. That's the gag. Get it? I told him I got it.

"A few minutes before midnight I saw Stein coming toward the car. There was a



woman with him. I said to Greenberg, 'There's a *woman* with him!' I was surprised it was a woman. Greenberg said, 'I know. She's the party that's got to go.' "

When Stein arrived with Vivian, according to Schlitten, Stein introduced her to Greenberg, and Vivian got into the back seat and sat down between Greenberg and Stein and began making a big play for Greenberg.

"Greenberg," Schlitten said, "told me to drive to Max's, and I started down the hill. And then, I guess it must have been about a minute later, I heard a rumpus in the back seat, like people fighting. Vivian screamed and begged. She yelled real loud, 'Don't kill me! Don't kill me! Don't—' And then I heard a gasp, a hard, strained kind of noise. It gave me the shivers. Honest. I almost went off the road." He stopped talking, looked around, his eyes glazed with a faraway look of pain.

The detectives waited in silence, patiently.

Schlitten went on. "I heard a rattling noise then. A cackle. I turned around and saw Greenberg and Stein pulling the rope around Vivian's neck. They were pulling hard. I thought they were going to pull her head off. I felt like I wanted to vomit. Finally, they stopped

pulling on the rope and Stein said, 'She's finished now.' I looked at her face, a quick look, and even in the dim light of the car I could see she was dead." He bent his head to his chest and sat there like that for almost a minute.

A detective touched his shoulder lightly. Schlitten looked up. The pain was still in his eyes.

"Have a smoke," the detective said, and held out a pack of cigarettes.

Schlitten took several long drags on the cigarette and then resumed his story. He said he was ordered to drive to Van Cortlandt Park where Greenberg and Stein threw Vivian's body in the gully after removing her ring, watch, and coat.

"What happened next?" a detective asked.

"We drove to Madeline Tully's place, where Stein dropped off the mink coat. After that I drove to 49th Street and Eighth Avenue."

"Why?" a detective asked.

"Stein told me to. When we got there, Stein and Greenberg got out of the car. Izzy Lewis met me there and we returned the car to the rental agency."

Several days after the murder, Stein came to Schlitten's apartment and gave him two hundred dollars.

Schlitten said, "What's this? Two hundred? For what?"

"That's your end, what we got for the ring."

"A measely two hundred!" Schlitten said. "That ring was worth about three grand!"

"We only got a grand. The ring is very hot."

Schlitten then pointed to the front page of the New York *Evening Journal* that was lying on the table. "There's your friend, Chowder-Head Cohen. He's a meathead. I don't know why the hell I let myself get mixed up with a bum like that!"

Stein said, "The other guy is Radeloff. He's the party we done the job for. He's a smart cookie."

Stein was worried about the mink coat because of the publicity it was receiving in the papers. He told Schlitten that Madeline Tully had burned it in an incinerator. That accounted for the coat and the ring. The watch was never located.

SAM GREENBERG and Harry Stein went on trial in June with Harry Schlitten the principal witness against them. Schlitten told exactly the same story on the stand that he had told detectives. Each part of his testimony was corroborated by Izzy Lewis, David and Anna Buttermann, William Rosenfeld,

Max Mishkin, and a clerk and attendant from the K & S Auto Renting Company. It looked like an air-tight case.

Harry Stein's sister, an actress appearing in a Broadway show titled *SONS O' GUNS*, testified that her brother and she had attended a showing of *EAST LYNNE* at the Roxy Theatre. They had gone there because she admired the star, Ann Harding. She remembered the date because it was the only night she had off from her own show. After the performance, she said, "Harry and I had a bite to eat at a Chinese restaurant."

She was a very effective witness. Her name and reputation meant something too. As Marguerite Norris, her stage name, Stein's sister was a celebrity.

Sam Greenberg's sister, Mrs. Sophie Wallerstein, testified that on the night of February 25, her brother was sitting *Shivah*, the Jewish period of mourning, at her home.

"My mother died on the 20th," Mrs. Wallerstein testified. The mourning period runs for seven days. That's why I'm so certain of my brother's presence in my home on the night in question, the night of Miss Gordon's murder. I could not be mistaken."

The district attorney tried to

shake her testimony on cross-examination. He took her over every part of her testimony, sought vainly for a slip, some minor change in the time that Greenberg had arrived, the length of his stay, the exact time he left. He failed to shake her on any point. She was a cool, calm, and collected witness and gave her responses in incredibly respectful tones and manner. The jury was impressed.

Mrs. Wallerstein's testimony was corroborated by her son, a young man of sixteen named Sidney. He, too, was positive in his recollections of his uncle's visits to his parents' home for the purpose of sitting *Shivah*. He was a clean-cut young man, made an excellent impression, and was as polite and courteous as his mother in his responses.

Moses Dorfman, a delicatessen store operator, who said he had never been in Mrs. Wallerstein's home except that one time, on the night of February 25, testified that he saw and spoke with Sam Greenberg there from nine o'clock until eleven o'clock in the evening.

"Why did you go to Mrs. Wallerstein's home on that particular evening, of all evenings?" the district attorney asked, and eyed Dorfman suspiciously.



"I delivered several platters of food," Dorfman replied. "Cold cuts. Corned beef, pastrami, tongue, sours, you know, pickles. . ."

The district attorney cut him short. "All right, Mr. Dorfman, I don't want a full list of what you brought."

Dorfman elicited laughter from the crowded courtroom with his reply. "Excuse me. I thought maybe you didn't know what was in a Kosher delicatessen."

"I'm very well aware of what is sold in a Kosher delicatessen, Mr. Dorfman," the district attorney snapped. Then as an afterthought, "Who isn't?" He attacked Dorfman's testimony further. "Who ordered those

platters of corned beef, pastrami, sours, and all the other stuff?"

Dorfman spread his hands. "Friends. Two men and a woman came to my store and said they wanted the platters made up. It's the custom, you know? The mourners are not supposed to cook or shop or anything. It's the religion."

"All right. And what time was it that these two men and this woman came into your store on the evening of February 25th?"

"Oh, maybe seven-thirty, maybe a little earlier."

"What time do you generally close your store?"

"Eight o'clock. There's a sign on my window. Open from eight to eight. Everybody in the neighborhood knows this. Moe's Deli. From eight to eight." He glanced around the courtroom as if to convey the information in case prospective customers wanted to visit his establishment.

"Very well," the district attorney sighed. "How long did it take you to make up the platters of food?"

"Who knows? Maybe forty-five minutes."

"So that it was about eight-fifteen when you finished with the platters? Is that correct?"

"Could be."

"You then had to put away food in the ice-box, is that correct?"

"Of course."

"And how much time did that take, to your best recollection?"

"Always the same. About twenty minutes."

"That would make it somewhere around eight-thirty or a little later, is that correct?"

"Could be the way you say it. Why not?"

"Then you tidied up the store, is that correct?"

"Not much. I have a very clean place. Moe's Deli. Everybody knows. A very clean place."

It was obvious to the jury and the spectators, as well as the judge that the district attorney was rapidly getting nowhere with Dorfman. The defense attorneys restrained smiles.

The district attorney asked then, "Now, Mr. Dorfman, you tidied up the place—" He held up a hand. "I know, Mr. Dorfman. It's a clean place. Not much tidying up to do. Now, you closed up the place and walked to the Wallerstein residence. How long did that take you?"

"Seven, eight minutes. The flat is just around the corner. I knocked on the door. A man let me in, and—"

"Did you recognize the man?"

It was a fatal question.

"Yes, sir. It was Sam Greenberg."

The defense attorneys smiled, turned to glance quickly at the jury. Several jurors also smiled.

The district attorney stared hard at Dorfman for several long moments. "All right, Mr. Dorfman, no more questions. You may step down."

In their summations to the jury both defense attorneys charged the police with attempting to frame Greenberg and Stein with perjured testimony, that the case was so hot they had to convict somebody, and that they chose Greenberg and Stein as the fall guys.

The district attorney pleaded impassionately for a guilty verdict. He pointed out that the witnesses for the defendants were comprised of relatives and friends.

"We had the sister of Harry Stein on the stand who testified in his behalf. I will not here impugn the testimony of Marguerite Norris except to say that a loving sister would be prone to shadow her testimony in order to save her brother's life. I remind you that Miss Norris is an accomplished actress. Her composure on the witness stand was so complete,

so assured, it was almost as though she were playing a role. I ask that you give that portion of the defense careful and prudent consideration in your deliberations.

"Next, we had the sister of Sam Greenberg, Mrs. Sophie Wallerstein. I ask you again to consider the motivation of that testimony, as well as of Sidney Wallerstein, a nephew of the accused. How far would those two witnesses venture from the truth in order to save the life of a brother or uncle? Here again, I ask you to give careful and prudent consideration to the testimony of each of those two witnesses.

"Mr. Moses Dorfman?" He shrugged eloquently. "A born salesman. A merchant. A neighborhood favorite gossiping over his delicatessen counter with his customers. He could not have testified in any way than what he did and still hope to remain in business. He had to choose between a loss of his livelihood, his investment, the role of a hero, of a kind," he added sarcastically, "or that of a traitor to his kind. I leave that decision in your hands as to his interest and motivation.

"A woman was murdered. Strangled. A horrible way to die. She was killed by men with no mercy, compassion, or pity in their hearts. This was as

cold-blooded a murder as it has been my sworn duty to prosecute. It was a murder for profit, a woman's mink coat, her ring, and watch. That much you heard from the witness stand on testimony by witnesses who had no motivation other than to tell the truth. I ask you to bring in a verdict of murder in the first degree and to send the perpetrators of this heinous crime to their just deserts. Either that, or set them free to kill again. I place the safety of society in your capable hands, secure in the belief you will return a just and true verdict."

The jury retired after receiving the judge's charge. Only a few spectators left the courtroom as the principals and witnesses awaited the jury's verdict. The jury was out several hours. When they returned, the judge warned the spectators against any outburst.

The judge asked the jury if they had reached a verdict, and who was to speak for them.

The foreman replied, "I will, Your Honor."

"How find you? Guilty or not guilty?"

There was moment's hush in the courtroom and then the foreman of the jury spoke in a clear, loud voice. "We, the jury, find the defendants, Sam Greenberg and Harry Stein, *not guilty!*"

There was a loud outburst in the courtroom, joy and tears in the eyes and faces of Mrs. Wallerstein, Marguerite Norris, and the two defendants. Everyone embraced, and shook hands with the two defense attorneys. The judge rapped for order, and then, in solemn tones, dismissed Greenberg and Stein.

All the principals eventually were in court on other charges. Stein on larceny charges. Radeloff on extortion charges. Sam Greenberg disappeared from his known haunts.

No one ever was punished for Vivian Gordon's murder. Her killers may yet be alive and walking the streets. Then again, maybe not, for sooner or later everyone is paid off in his own coin.

It was like that for Vivian Gordon, even if she had to pay for her way of life with a horrible death.

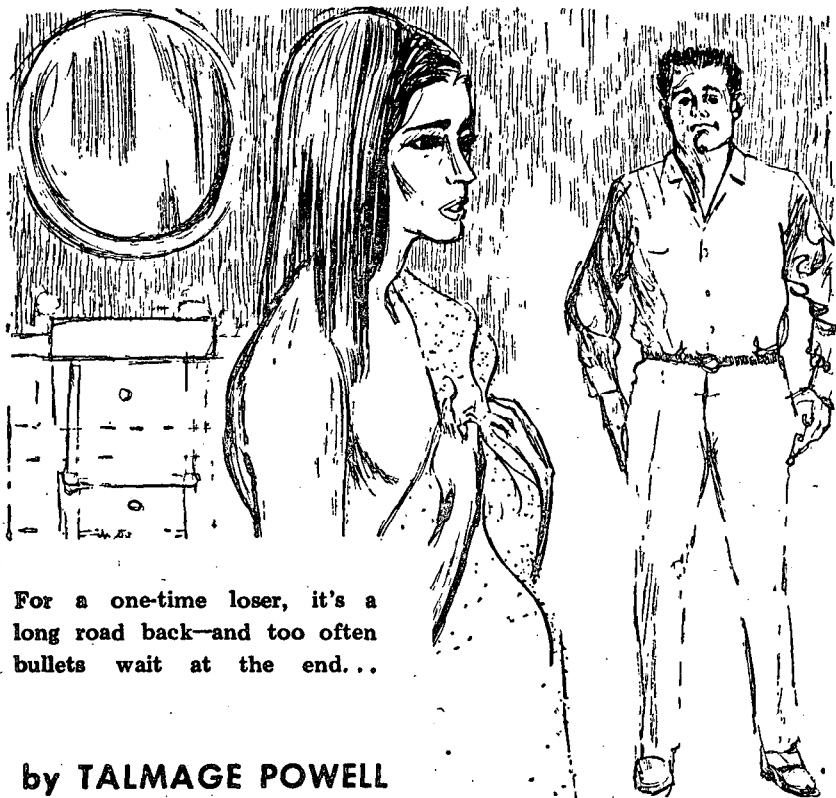


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For a one-time loser, it's a long road back—and too often bullets wait at the end...

by TALMAGE POWELL

## PAROLE VIOLATION

THE PAROLE supervisor's office fitted the man. It was gloomy, a little seedy, with a feeling of dusty untidiness.

The big cop who'd escorted me in said, "Here he is, Sam. Fred Davis. Another nose to wipe."

A cop of the old school, he shoved me another step toward Sam Lagin's desk and then turned around and went out.

"Pull up a chair and sit down, Freddie," Lagin said.

He stood behind his desk, a moth-eaten, bullish figure. Bag-



gy gray suit, rumpled shirt, necktie with a wrinkled knot. Big, fleshy face with a drab, brown, old-uncle mustache that matched his hair and mean little eyes that were almost colorless.

With the power of the state to back him, Sam Lagin was the parole officer who'd run my life for the next two years, and I wondered if the pokey may not turn out to be just the frying pan. . .

As I eased onto a scuffed wooden chair, Lagin settled behind his desk. He pawed through the litter until he found the file he wanted.

He let me sweat while he read, grunting now and then while he did so. He looked at me at last, the loose lips below the unkempt mustache tightening into a smile that was more sly and secret than happy.

"Fred B. Davis, age twenty-five, fair education, better than average I.Q.," he recited. "What's your trouble, Freddie? Can't stand the routine of punching a time clock?"

I let it hang there, and after a few seconds his heavy face darkened a shade.

"Boy, you answer when I speak to you!"

"Yes, sir," I said.

His eyes drifted back to the folder. "Bought yourself some real trouble, didn't you? Mugged a well-heeled citizen one

dark night and took his cash, watch, ring, credit cards and car. Picked up your chick Clemmie and partied through three states before the law put the arm on you."

"I've learned my lesson, Mr. Lagin," I said earnestly.

"Have you, Freddie? I'm betting you're a natural born criminal, easily bored, lacking in self-discipline, itching for excitement, and always looking for the easy way out. You're a good looking kid, Freddie, even if it's on the tall, skinny side. That boyish face and wide brown eyes might fool a lot of people—But not me. I'm pegging you as lazy, self-centered, with no stomach for the responsibilities acceptable to most members of society."

His words brought a pink anger to my face, but I pressed my elbows hard on the wooden arms of the chair and kept my mouth shut.

Lagin spotted my reaction, and the first glint of pleasure came to his smile.

"Well," he said, "we'll see. Seventy-eight percent of your kind return to crime almost the minute you're back on the streets. It's my job to whittle away at that figure, Freddie, and I do the best I can. I've fifty-three of you to wet-nurse at the moment, and despite the

gloomy prospects I'm pulling for you, Freddie."

"Thank you, Mr. Lagin," I said, because it seemed the thing to say.

He dropped the folder carelessly on the desk. "You know the rules. You entered a contract when you applied for parole."

"You'll have no trouble from me, Mr. Lagin."

"Thus spake seventy-eight percent," he muttered dourly. "But in prison or out, you won't make much difference in the crime rate, Freddie. It always rises, no matter how hard Mrs. Lagin's boy Sam tries."

He pushed back his chair, ending the interview. "Even with fifty-three, I always try to keep an extra close eye on new members of the club for awhile."

"I understand, Mr. Lagin."

"I hope so. Get a good night's sleep, stay off the streets and on the job that's been arranged for you. It's up to you, Freddie. It's your parole."

I didn't get a good night's sleep. Sam Lagin's face drifted through too many dreams.

It was a day laborer's job on the construction site of a housing development, the kind of toil where the shortage of willing bone and flesh makes even a parolee welcome. It was

hoddling bricks, barrowing loads of cement, and staggering under burdens of lumber. It was a big-mouthed foreman and an hourly wage barely over the minimum.

At night I was too gut-wrung for even the threat of Sam Lagin to bother my sleep, the daytime nightmare being more than enough. Prison began to look good by comparison. In the pokey I'd been the star hitter on the softball team, the chow had been better than greasy spoon slop, and the cell bunk cleaner than the cot in the flophouse room my paycheck could afford.

Worst of all were the tormenting memories of the times with Clemmie and the woman-hungers a guy builds during three years of prison.

I didn't see hide or mustache of Sam Lagin for three weeks, and I began to relax on that score. I figured out how much time it would take him to chase around after fifty-three of us and decided that no man could move that fast. With seventy-eight percent of fifty-three always in trouble, Lagin needed to divide himself into five parts. It was some pleasure to fancy the old galoot's headaches.

By the third weekend I couldn't stand the nothingness any longer. Without admitting to myself that fresh plans for

the future were stirring in my mind, I ambled out of the rooming house. Wow! I blinked. There was sunshine on the sidewalk!

I set off with the old blood turning warm and red in flesh that had been too long in cold storage.

Finding Clemmie was easy, although it took a good part of the day. She'd moved half a dozen times since I'd last seen her, changing from one job to another. At each place she'd either left a forwarding, or somebody who'd worked with her knew the location of the next job.

I traced her to a blue-collar bar and grille run by a scrawny, tough little gamecock named O'Leary. I reached the place after dark. It was fairly crowded with guys working their jaws with talk, pastrami, beer, boilermakers, and pickled eggs.

My pulse rate slipped into high gear as I threaded through the talk, juke box noise, and lazy layers of tobacco smoke, craning my neck for the first sight of that center-fold figure, that impish face, that golden tumble of hair.

My knees shivered suddenly. I threw out my arms. "Clemmie!"

She almost dropped the tray

of drinks she was carrying. "Freddie!" she squealed.

She plopped the tray on the nearest table. We met in the middle of the room, my hug lifting her feet from the floor. Several of the customers tossed laughing remarks and clapped their hands.

We tugged each other to a small vacant table against the further wall.

"Freddie," she said, her shining blue eyes dancing all over me, "it really is you!"

She seemed so happy I didn't tell her I'd been out going on a month. I wondered at my dumb, earlier fears of Sam Lagin.

"Baby," I said thickly, "you look so good—"

"And you, Freddie."

"It's been so long. Say, you haven't got married or anything?"

"Nothing I can't break off like kicking off an old shoe, Freddie."

"That's great, baby."

"There's never been anybody but you, Freddie. Not in my heart, where it counts."

I laughed, just from the way the world had changed all of a sudden.

"You were so sweet, Freddie," she said, "the way you protected me when they arrested you."

I shrugged, feeling like a big

man. "I told you a long time ago you were my girl, didn't I? I take care of what's mine. Anyway, the fuzz had me dead to rights. The least I could do was stick to my story that you didn't know I'd been operating with somebody else's dough, car, and credit cards. No matter what they suspected, they couldn't build a case against you."

"Freddie," she said through moistly parted lips, "you are the bravest, greatest, most loyal man—"

Her sweet music was interrupted by the arrival of her boss at the table. Clemmie introduced us, explaining that I was an old friend of the family and schoolmate she hadn't seen in years. O'Leary's ire was somewhat soothed. Reminding me of a twitchy mouse, he shook hands and suggested to Clemmie that she get back to work.

It was great, sitting there and chugging my first cold beer in more than three years and watching Clemmie's bright movements from table to table.

A beautiful half hour passed, and then I felt like I was being stared at. My eyes cut along the bar. A big, dark-haired man had come in and was being served a shot glass. His gaze caught with mine. He glanced away, as if trying to decide whether or not to admit he'd seen me.



He was Porter Attics, a bricklayer on the construction job. Making up his mind, he tossed his drink down in one swallow, swiped the back of his hand across his mouth, and came over to the table.

"How goes, Freddie?"

"Okay. Sit down, Port."

He lowered his beef into the chair Clemmie had vacated, sat looking at his knuckles, then lifted his eyes to mine.

"Freddie," he said with some hesitation, "ain't neither of us seen the other in a gin mill. Okay?"

I didn't dig. He saw the frown grow on my face.

"I mean when we have to report to Sam Lagin," he explained. "He'll figure we've met on the job. You'll find that

he's always picking, trying to make a stoolie out of you."

I gawked at him, then laughed. "Well, how about that! Two members of the fifty-three club."

"Yeah," Attics said, "and joints serving booze are off-limits to us—with six more months of my parole to go."

I slapped him on the shoulder. "So forget it, Porter! Sam Lagin, the creep, couldn't make me stoolie if he ran over me with a bulldozer."

"Likewise," Port nodded, relaxing. "I had you pegged as a right guy, first day you reported on the job. How about I buy?"

"To drink to Sam Lagin," I suggested.

He got a laugh out of that. "I got a feeling you and me is going to get along, Freddie."

Lovely evening. I'd found a pal with common interests, common lingo, and Clemmie was serving the drinks.

I reported in to Sam Lagin at my appointed hour. He grunted that he was glad to see my punctuality, asked me how I was getting along on the job.

I conned him with some talk about how I wanted to look into this job training deal.

"Don't want to barrow cement for the rest of my life, Mr. Lagin."

"Well, that sounds fine,

Freddie. Always good to see a man who wants to better himself. We'll certainly look for an opening in some line of work you'd like to do."

I halfway listened to him ramble along about various opportunities in the job training programs. I nodded when I was supposed to and asked a question when it seemed proper. But in my mind, I was way ahead of him. Now that I was back with Clemmie, the job was a hole in the head.

There was a big, wide world out there waiting for Clemmie and me. We'd already talked about it some. Sam Lagin would be no problem at all. I was already more than up to here with him, his stinking job, with wrestling piles of lumber all day after a night with Clemmie.

Parole violation had lost its first fears for me. The country was full of parole absconders, as the legal term put it. I'd got caught the first time because I'd played it dumb. I wouldn't play it that way again.

Question was, what kind of hit? Not a two-bit job like sticking up a filling station? I wanted loot Clemmie and I could really enjoy.

I wondered—for a second—if Porter Attics might have some ideas. He and I had got to be real pals since the night we met

in O'Leary's. But I nixed him. He only had a few more months until he could thumb his nose at all the bricks his parole slavery had forced him to lay. Also, he'd done time twice for rough stuff, assault with a deadly weapon and a truck hijacking. I wanted a hit that was much less spectacular. . .

"Got all that, Freddie?" Lagin finished, lifting his baleful little eyes.

"Oh, yes, sir, Mr. Lagin."

"Fine. Just stick with it and we'll get you into one of those tech school night classes when the new semester starts in the fall."

"I'm looking forward to it, Mr. Lagin." And that was partly the truth. I didn't bother to mention to him that I was looking forward to being with Clemmie on a nice southern beach when autumn rolled around.

Clemmie wanted to go out that night, but the best I could do was drag into her apartment and flop on the couch, bushed from laying sewer line laterals all day.

"You poor baby," she said, bringing me a beer and stroking my forehead with her tantalizing fingertips, "what are they doing to you?"

"Killing me," I said.

"Like you were no better than a mule. Freddie, it's not

fair—We're going to put a stop to it!"

I forced my beat-up muscles to work me to a sitting position, asking a book full of questions with a single word: "How?"

She snuggled down beside me. "You remember when I was a cocktail waitress in the hotel lounge, I spotted the guy with the car, the cash, credit cards?"

"Sure do," I said.

"Best job I ever had," she mused. "But I didn't regret walking off from it, not for a minute, Freddie."

"Likewise. Great party while it lasted."

"The next will last a lot longer, Freddie."

"With whose loot?" I asked.

"O'Leary's."

I drew away from her a little, looking her full in the face.

"It's like this," she explained. "Every first and third Saturday of the month, when Kreighton Mills makes a payday, O'Leary's does a land office business from early opening to late closing. Sometimes there's nearly five or six thousand dollars in the kitty by the time O'Leary locks up."

"And O'Leary with that big forty-five automatic he keeps under the bar and police cruisers prowling the neighbor-

hood! Even if I got out of the bar, one yell from O'Leary and the fuzz would corner me in half a block. Uh-uh, baby, heist at gunpoint isn't my prescription."

Clemmie kissed me lightly on the ear. "I know, darling, and I wouldn't have you take that risk. I want you to walk out of O'Leary's with everything nice and quiet, and the money under your shirt."

"O'Leary doesn't strike me as the nice, quiet, donating type." I killed the remainder of the beer, crumpling the empty in my fingers. "We'll have to think of something else, Clemmie."

She pouted, tilting her cute blonde head. "Don't you want to hear the rest of it?"

"Is there a rest of it?"

"You just listen, honey pot." She wriggled comfortably on the couch. "This is how it is. O'Leary used to take all that bread to the night depository of the bank. But when he was stuck up for the third time, he made some changes."

"I'll bet he did. Third time's always the charm."

"Please, Freddie," she huffed. "Will you let me finish?"

"Be my guest."

"Well, O'Leary turned his private office into a fort. Steel bars on the windows. Burglar alarm wires all over the place.

And a huge, burglar-proof safe to keep his boodle in until he can make trips to the bank in daytime hours with a security guard."

"That really cuts it. Steel bars, hot wires, and huge safes are all beyond my calling."

"You need another beer," she said in that endearing, unpredictable way. She was up and back with the beer like a golden wisp.

She sat down and rested her head against my shoulder. "O'Leary unlocks his private office door, walks to the safe, opens it, and puts his money in. If someone quick and strong, like you, Freddie, were hiding inside the office, it would be simple to tap O'Leary on the head—not too hard so he isn't seriously hurt—as he walks through the door. Then someone quick and strong could take the money and walk right out that door, quiet as a little old kitten."

"Yeah, if someone could melt his way through steel window bars and burglar alarm wires and be inside the office when O'Leary entered."

"Just slip into the short hallway that leads to the office, Freddie. You could do it, easy, with that late, noisy crowd in the bar. Then unlock O'Leary's office, close the door so the lock clicks, and be waiting in



there when the unsuspecting little hamster comes in with the loot."

"Let's forget the impossible right now," I said, nuzzling her cheek. "With the beer and rest, I'm feeling like a new man. Also I couldn't pick the lock on a piece of discount house luggage, much less the lock O'Leary's bound to have on that office door."

She didn't move away from my nuzzling, but it didn't have the desired effect on her chemistry either. As if her mind was elsewhere, she said, "Freddie, a girl working in a place like O'Leary's learns to keep her eyes open. She meets all kinds of people, too."

I shifted position, taking a swallow of beer. "So?"

"So she knows where Mr. O'leary keeps his bundle of keys, beside the automatic gun under the counter," Clemmie said. "She knows how to make an impression of a certain key in a piece of wax in a few seconds when nobody is looking. And she knows a fellow or two who will make a key from that impression for a twenty-dollar bill, no questions asked."

She stirred, sitting up and wriggling her fingers into the slash pocket of her hotpants. She slipped out the duplicate key to O'Leary's office.

Dangling in her fingers,



bright new metal catching the fire of reflected light, it positively hypnotized me.

One thing O'Leary had failed to put in his office was air-conditioning. Or maybe the sweats came from the waiting there in the darkness.

From the bar came the muted sounds of the last customers leaving, guys shouting good night to O'Leary, a character with too many under his belt singing a mournful song.

The song was cut off in the middle of a flat note and I knew O'Leary had closed the door behind the customer.

Silence.

Nothing, except this vacuum sucking at my ears and trying to stifle my breath.

I stood pressed close to the wall beside the office door, the length of old pipe in my gloved hand.

Distantly, I heard Clemmie say good night.

"See you tomorrow, Clemmie," O'Leary responded in his high, thin voice.

More silence.

All of them were gone now, except O'Leary and the bartenders. The bartenders would be rinsing the last of the glasses, shucking their barman's jackets, gulping tired yawns. O'Leary would be taking the last of the receipts from the cash register.

Time was the slow crawling of hot lava.

A few more muffled words out there that I couldn't make out. O'Leary seeing his barmen off. O'Leary closing the front door and springing the lock, alone in the bar now. Giving the place the final glance for the night. Cutting the lights to night-dim.

The sudden rattle of his key in the office door lock almost jarred me out of my shoes.

The door swung open, and too suddenly almost, he was there, a scrawny silhouette in the very faint night light filtering from the bar.

I suddenly felt so clumsy and awkward that I almost panicked. The pipe weighed half a ton. He surely knew I was there.

I didn't realize it was over until I heard the pipe thunk against his crown. He folded without a whisper, and I stood looking at the dim shadow of him, too scared to move. Was it I who actually hit him?

The pipe bumped on the floor. I kneeled beside O'Leary. I'd padded the pipe with a wrap-around rag, and the skin on O'Leary's scalp wasn't even broken. He looked for all the world like a little kid dreaming happily as he lay there. His breathing was steady, and I figured he wouldn't be uncon-

scious for more than half an hour. It was time enough for our purposes.

He'd carried a heavy brown paper bag into the office. I opened it just long enough to make sure it was full of money.

When I crossed the bar and reached the front door, I clung to shadows, looking at the street. A car slipped past, then the wee-hours desertion returned to the street.

I worked quickly, going out, making sure the door spring-locked behind me, and then, the money stashed under my jacket, I strolled along innocently whistling a Bacharach tune until I had rounded the corner. There, I moved faster, using the next twenty minutes to put me into Clemmie's apartment.

We had to tone down the celebration somewhat to keep from waking other tenants in the grubby old building. I spilled the bread in a lovely green mound on the coffee table. We laughed. We hugged. I picked her up and we went round and round. We kissed and kissed again. Then she popped the cork on a bottle of champagne she'd bought for the occasion.

We were just lifting the glasses when, quite without warning, a big brute in the hallway put a heavy heel against

the door and kicked it open, tearing the lock into several dozen pieces.

The open doorway framed Sam Lagin, and Clemmie and I stood looking at him, two frozen stills cut from a movie by a film editor.

Lagin was breathing hard, and his eyes had color now. Deep pink was the hue, almost blood red.

I moved then, trying to shield the money from Lagin's sight. But he'd seen it already. He heeled the broken door closed, crossed to Clemmie and me, and strangely enough, instead of touching the money, he picked up the champagne bottle and looked at the famed label.

He had his breathing steadied down. He set the bottle slowly on the table.

"Celebration's kind of premature, isn't it, kids?"

"Whoever you are," Clemmie said angrily, "you can't break in here and—"

"I can't?" Sam Lagin said. He looked at the broken door lock, then all around the room. "But it seems I have, doesn't it?"

"Throw the nut out of here, Freddie," Clemmie's voice was a suppressed shriek. "I'll call the police and—"

It was my turn to interrupt her. "Easy, baby. He's Sam Lagin."

"Your parole officer?" she choked.

"Awakened by a telephone call at an unearthly hour, which I don't like," Lagin added in venomous complaint. He cut those chilling eyes at me. "I told you, boy. I always keep close tabs on new members of the club."

I looked from Sam Lagin to the money, and I went over to the couch, clutched the arm weakly, and sat down.

"How?" I asked. "You haven't been around."

"Spies, boy. I keep the club shot full of spies. You haven't made a move without my knowing."

My teeth clicked together. Feeling surged through me. Almost as great as my sense of loss was the anger I suddenly felt for Porter Attics. The rotten stoolie! Tipping Lagin off to everything I did or said.

Grizzly mean, Lagin stood before me, hands on hips. "I see you guessed about Porter Attics, boy. Now there's a man who values his parole, just as you should. You lifted a few with him tonight."

"You know I did!" I said, my throat filled with the bitterest frustration.

"And he figured, from your manner, that you were plenty up, boy. Planning something, maybe. He said good night and

drifted out—and drifted back in again. He saw you slip into O'Leary's hallway and not come out again. Enough to heighten his suspicions, wouldn't you say, boy? So when the bar is closing and you still haven't showed up, he drifts across the street and takes up a station in a dark doorway. He sees you come out at last—after everybody, except O'Leary, has left and O'Leary has locked up for the night."

"That rat," I said, clenching and unclenching my hands, "that scum of scum!"

Clemmie simply crumpled in a heap beside me and started crying.

Lagin let out a long sigh. "Don't feel so hard at Porter, boy. Doing his job, that's all. He sees you clutching that bulge under your jacket and he naturally assumes a heist. At least, he figures it's enough to call me. And while I'm cranking up my car I hear the news on the police band. O'Leary has recovered consciousness and hollered cop. So all I had to do was to decide whether to head for your place or here." He laughed, drily.

"You know the saying, *Cherchez la femme*," he said. "So Clemmie's place it was. And look what I find."

He turned toward the coffee table and touched the money

with a fingertip. "Boy," he said, "a long time ago I decided I was on the losing end of a lousy, thankless job. That's what I sure did decide, boy. Down-town they think I'm a great parole officer because my boys always beat the seventy-eight percent average who return to crime. It's the way I handle them, boy, the way I do my job. The worst ones, murderers, rapists, I send back, boy, the minute they breathe wrong on the rules of parole. But there are others. Bright kids, the naturals—they're the ones I

work hardest with, boy, in private little efforts to preserve their paroles. That's why I'm working so hard with you, boy."

I inched to a tight, sitting position while I watched him drag a hassock over to the coffee table.

"Sam," I husked, "what is it you want?"

He sat down, wet his finger tips, and began counting the money. "My half, boy. I always want my half—and if you value your parole you'll always make damned sure you've got it ready!"



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## MURDER IS A DEADLY GAME

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by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*He was a hunted thing, looking in vain for the sanctuary that must forever be denied him. For Death was riding wild in the Miami night, triggered by desperate men, and Mike Shayne alone, without a real chance, must somehow come between a vicious crime army and the innocent man they had marked for death. Don't miss this powerful novel. It's one of Halliday's very best!*

## A Story of Death in the Skies



# CLIMB UP TO HELL

by ROBERT COLBY

*Strong wings were under him, carrying  
him away from the scene of his perfect crime. He  
stared. Wings of gold, or of dusty Death?*

GREG COULTER'S wife died on the operating table during what was considered a simple, routine operation. He was totally unprepared.

Cheryl's death was senseless, shockingly abrupt. She was only thirty-four, eight years younger than Greg. Married fourteen years, they had no children, yet were extremely close. Much more deeply and exclusively involved than most couples, they were dependent upon each other for all things. And when Cheryl died, Greg was devastated, lost. Anchor-

less, he began to drift downhill in a disastrous tide of events.

The surgeon told him there were 'complication.' And these complications were explained in the chill, vapid jargon of medical terminology. It sounded as if Cheryl had been merely a machine stretched out on a work bench for repairs. Some little gadget failed and they just couldn't keep the machine running. Too bad.

He wanted to shout insanely, "Don't explain, don't justify, just bring her back!"

After the funeral Coulter



returned to his job as assistant to the office manager of Global Oil Company, one of the giants in the industry. It was a dull, routine sort of job, endured through the years only for the sake of Cheryl.

He could no longer concentrate. He sat numbly for trackless periods, listening to the melancholy rumblings of his thoughts. His desk became littered with unsorted papers, documents unattended, letters unsigned. The ringing of phones, the clacking of office machines came to him submerged, muted as the murmur of traffic floating up to the bedroom windows of his apartment seventeen floors above the city.

He tried to kill the pain of lonely evenings without Cheryl in a drench of alcohol at The Idle Hour, a neighborhood bar. Usually a moderate drinker, he awoke with brutal hangovers. He had no heart for work and performed badly, sleepwalking through the days, often sipping covertly from a half pint he kept in his desk.

He wasn't much surprised when Norm Welty, the office manager, called him in one day to suggest that for the sake of his physical and mental well-being, it might be best for him to resign. That was Welty's way of telling him—you're fired!

Outside the office, Welty's secretary, Chris Emory, beckoned him. Chris was a slender widow in her mid-thirties with sensitive features enveloped by a long cascade of regal black hair. She had sad brown eyes and a look of soft vulnerability. A couple of years back she had lost her husband and her little girl in an auto accident.

"You're not alone, Greg," she said. "I know how it is. After all this time I still can't bear to talk about my own loss. But I wanted to tell you that in a few weeks the worst of it will pass, and you'll be able to cope. Just have faith." She offered him a tender, sympathetic smile.

"How very kind of you, Chris," he said. "But I doubt if I'll ever be able to cope again, and I don't much care. I loathe this stinking job and any other you could name. They're all alike. Time traps, prisons. When Cheryl was alive, I had an incentive to work. Now I couldn't care less, just want to drift.

"I won't miss the job, but I'll sure miss you, Chris. You're my favorite, the best friend I had here."

"Well, if it becomes too much, if you need to talk it out with someone—"

"I'll remember that, Chris. And thanks, you're quite a gal."



He bent to give her a kiss on the forehead, then hurried away, his eyes filling.

Greg deposited his terminal paycheck in the bank near his apartment where, before her health began to fail, Cheryl had been employed in the accounting department. When he was scraping the barrel he would find another job. With Cheryl gone it seemed unimportant.

Now he became a regular at The Idle Hour, where he made friends with the bartender and assorted customers who were frequent visitors. He learned to drink almost continuously without losing control, though he seldom came down from that altitude where reality fades and responsibility can at least be postponed until tomorrow. And tomorrow And tomorrow.

In a couple of months the acute pain of Cheryl's death became a chronic ache. But by then his rent was long overdue, the power and phone companies were threatening to chop him off. Half a dozen checks were ready to bounce, and he had only a few dollars in his wallet. More, all his last-minute, feverish applications for a job had been turned down. Apparently Welty had given him somewhat less than an enthusiastic recommendation.

Late on a Wednesday afternoon, contemplating the ulti-



mate solution to all his problems, he stood on the terrace of his apartment in a towering high-rise at the edge of the city. Leaning against the waist-high guard rail, he peered down at the cement walk seventeen stories below. The distance made his mind wheel and tilt. To fall in such a long dive to the relentless pavement was unthinkable. After the first splitsecond of contact he would feel nothing.

But the frantic interval of awareness during the hurtling tumble was a much more frightening prospect than the welcome surrender to oblivion. Better to use that instant panacea which rested in a box on a closet shelf—the blue-steel .32 automatic, bought during a rash of burglaries in the building. Simple, efficient, it would be swift and painless.

In the kitchen he poured the dregs from a bottle of vodka

into a glass and drank it down in a gulp. He got the gun from the box and, sinking into a chair, rammed a shell into the chamber. Then he pressed the cool mouth of the barrel to his temple.

Inevitably, his mind swam with images of Cheryl, then broke into wildly scattered fragments of thought, and came together again. Until there was nothing but the enormity of the thing he was about to do, and he was about to squeeze the trigger.

The phone was ringing. The sound reached him from afar, slowly dredging him up from the deep mire of self-mesmerism. As the ringing continued harshly at his elbow, he was struck by the absurdity of that mundane intrusion. Yet, in the reflex of long habit, as if death could await the more immediate and practical summons of the phone, he rested the gun in his lap and lifted the receiver.

It was Ross McGill, the resident manager. "Been trying to reach you for a couple of days," he said, his high, irritating tenor edged with sarcasm. "Thought maybe you'd left town. Coulter, about your rent. The owners refuse to carry you any longer, and unless we have a cash payment within three days—"

Coulter lowered the phone, stared at it for a moment, almost smiling, then banged it into the cradle.

The ringing of the phone had broken the spell, the demand for money awakened his anger. The outrageous irony of it! Even as he stood at the edge of eternity, they were still shouting money. A minute after they were finished with his corpse down at the morgue, they would be phoning around to see who was going to pay for the funeral package. Well he knew, for the dispatch of Cheryl from mortuary to grave had cleaned what savings were left after he paid the medical expenses.

Really, the true enemy of human existence was money! If there had been enough to obtain a top surgeon, a specialist, perhaps Cheryl would still be around. And even if there were a remote chance that he might be able to join her, transported to the next world by the aid of a .32 caliber bullet, he would postpone his departure from *this* world if the years ahead of him promised escape from grinding toil for the sake of a few bucks to keep him alive.

Cheryl would not want him to live in a state of morbid grief and solitude. And but for a quantity of foolish green paper, those official passports to

freedom, he could find some sweet gal like Chris Emory and live in reasonable peace and happiness.

He gazed at the gun, thought of its mindless, indiscriminate power over life and death. You could turn it upon yourself, or use it against someone else, and it was indifferent. When you stood behind a gun, the power was yours. People jumped to obey your commands, did exactly what you told them.

If you were desperate for money you could walk into any bank, and you could demand as much as they had on hand. You would seldom get an argument. And if your luck ran out and you were confronted by the police and they shot you dead—would it matter?

But if, on the other hand, you could pull it off, it might be very good to be alive. In any case, one thing was clear. If you didn't like the shape of things in this world and you wanted to blast yourself into the next, you could do it anytime. First the big gamble for life. And if you lost, death would be patiently waiting. Why not? What did he have to lose?

For the remainder of that day and all the next, he explored the ways and means of it, probing his memory for every small detail on the security operation of banks, chief

gleaned from Cheryl in mere curiosity. Formulating a step-by-step plan, performing experiments in disguise, he made careful preparations.

On Friday morning he called one of the major airlines and booked himself on an evening flight to Hawaii. Then he phoned Chris Emory at the office of Global Oil.

"Lunch? Well, I have a date with one of the girls," she said. "But for you, Greg, I'll break it. Say, you sound pretty chipper. How're you making out these days?"

"I'd rather answer that one at lunch," he said. "To make it simple, we'll just take the elevator to Top O' the World. I'll make a reservation."

It was an expensive restaurant on the top, the forty-second floor of the Global Oil Building. He told her he had a dental appointment near noon and might be a few minutes late, would she wait for him in the office?

There was at least a fifty-fifty chance that he would not be able to make it at all for lunch. She would never know why until she read about it in the newspapers.

He dressed himself in a plain brown business suit, brown shoes, white shirt with deep-green tie and matching handkerchief. Underneath the brown

trousers, cuffs pinned up, he wore pearl-gray dacks. From a waste bin he had recovered a large piece of heavy wrapping paper bearing the name of a men's clothing store. He used it to neatly package a lightweight, wrinkle-proof blazer of a blue-gray color, a royal blue tie with matching handkerchief, and a pair of black shoes.

Before tying these items with cord, he stood before a mirror to peel off a wig of thick, wavy black hair which he had worn perpetually for years. To the extent that he was, even to himself, a stranger without it. Because, except for a narrow fringe of hair, seeded with gray, he was totally bald.

The wig was an expensive one of the finest quality. Only Cheryl had been aware of the secret. In vanity, he had kept it from all others. Noting that as a baldy he appeared years older, and there was about him an insipid, sexless quality, he placed the wig with the change of clothing and tied the bundle.

Studying himself in the mirror, Coulter stuffed wads of cotton, prepared to size after lengthy experiments, under his cheeks, against the gums. After making several adjustments, he was well satisfied. He had a rather long, lean face and the padding altered the features, lifting the cheeks, rounding

them out with a look of fleshy fullness.

In a minute he had aged ten years. And oddly, when he made a terse little speech, practiced for the occasion, the cotton absorbed a certain amount of resonance, and his voice had taken on a soft, nasal quality.

Ready now, toting a large briefcase containing only the automatic, the package under his arm, he opened the door and peered down the hall. It was empty. He stepped out.

Since he did not own a car, had found that living in town an auto was a needless expense, he took a bus to that familiar building of forty-two stories, three of which were occupied by the Global Oil Company. On the eighteenth floor he entered the men's room, unlocking the door with the key he had fortunately neglected to turn in.

As expected, the room was empty; there was seldom much traffic at this early hour. Even so, it was extremely doubtful that anyone would recognize him. In his present disguise, he would appear another of the many visitors who were loaned a key.

Swiftly he lifted the lid to the swing-door hamper for the disposal of paper towels, buried the package beneath the small

pile of discards accumulating at the bottom, and replaced the cover. The wash rooms were left unattended during the day, the cleaning and refurnishing of supplies was handled by a night crew. The hamper would not be emptied before he could retrieve the package.

Descending with the briefcase to the ground floor, he passed through a long, shop-rimmed arcade which tunneled to the next block. Reaching the other extreme of the arcade, Coulter turned into a small restaurant and seated himself beside a wall of glass overlooking the side entrance to the Security National Bank, one of the largest in the city.

Although the bank was in possession of oil company funds and a large percentage of Global employees kept their accounts at Security national, Greg Coulter was one of the exceptions. Quite naturally, he had always been a depositor at the bank where Cheryl was once employed. But Cheryl had been chummy with one of the girls who worked for Secutity National, and from Cheryl, he had learned second-hand, that the two banks had nearly identical systems of protection. About banks in general, Coulter had learned a great deal from Cheryl, including a few secrets not available to the public.



For instance, he knew that it was useless to hold up individual tellers with the hope of any sizeable take. A teller rarely had more than a couple of thousand at his window, since surplus cash from large deposits was quickly gathered and locked in the vault safe. And unless you had at least one armed accomplice to cover both employees and customers, you didn't have a prayer of scooping a collective haul from every window.

Further, there were silent

alarms to police monitoring stations, of the most imaginative sort. One of the oldest gimmicks was the trick packet of bills which appeared to be part of the teller's bank. But when lifted from their resting place, the bills released a spring trigger button concealed beneath and the cops were on their way.

No, it had to be done with a much more subtle and devious plan.

Coulter ordered breakfast with the wry thought that it might be his last, though he was curiously cool, resigned to accept whatever fate dealt him—the end of life, or a second beginning. He discovered that it was no simple matter to negotiate food with a mouthful of cotton and had to give up in disgust. Drinking only coffee, reading a newspaper, he sat treading water, until by his watch it was exactly eleven-thirty.

Then he paid the tab and departed, clutching the briefcase with its lethal burden for the job. Inside the bank he delayed at a counter, scratching figures on a deposit slip as he glanced covertly about to take his bearings. The bank was spacious, subdued as church, though the reverence was for money. Dark wood paneling and trim, deep burgandy carpet,

fine paintings and soft lighting, gave it a low-key elegance. Bank officers sat behind a row of gleaming mahogany desks, while at the left rear there was an office, its door ajar.

Coulter crossed the bank to a desk outside the office, the partly sealed door to which bore the name: *Walter D. Pomeroy, President.*

The dumpy, gray-haired secretary raised her head from the typing of a letter to gaze at him with a tepid, questioning expression.

"My name is Vincent Hollander," he said. It was a name plucked from the phone book. "My company is Hollander Electronics and I've come to see Mr. Pomeroy in connection with opening an account." His cheeks felt uncomfortably distended, his voice seemed not his own, but that of a stranger.

The secretary pursed her lips. "Well, Mr. Hollander, unless you have an appointment, I'm afraid Mr. Pomeroy has a rather heavy schedule this morning. But there are a number of other officers who could help you establish an account."

Coulter shook his head. "Perhaps you misunderstand. I'm not opening a personal account, but a business account for my company. We're moving our plant from Chicago to this

area and we would have funds on deposit well in excess of a million dollars. This bank has been highly recommended to us, but there are one or two others we are considering, and I must discuss certain details with Mr. Pomeroy before I come to a decision."

"Oh, well that's quite different," said the secretary, who was nodding rapidly in approval. "Let me take your card in to Mr. Pomeroy. I'm sure he'll be happy to make time for you."

"Certainly," Coulter answered. But then, groping in a compartment of his wallet, he frowned. "My, my," he grumbled, "I've made so many new contacts in the past few days, there's not a card left. Sorry."

"That's perfectly all right," she said, and tore a sheet of paper from a pad. "I'll just write it down."

Coulter repeated the bogus name and company as she took the information, then carried the slip into the office, pausing first to knock.

In a minute, she reappeared.

"Mr. Pomeroy will be happy to see you," she announced. "Go right in, please."

As he entered the office he closed the door tightly, then quickly stepped forward with hand outstretched. It was a windowless, dark-paneled room

which continued the same low-key splendor of the bank at large—a flavor of dignity and permanence, implying trust.

Walter D. Pomeroy was a small, fiftyish man with precise features. He had bulging, watered-down blue eyes, his smile was brief and mechanical as he offered a limp hand.

"Delighted that you came to us, Mr. Hollander," he said as he settled back into his swivel chair, his slight physique further diminished by the massive desk before him. "Now, sir, what can we do for you?"

Greg Coulter opened the briefcase in his lap and extended the automatic toward Mr. Pomeroy. "You can place both hands on the desk and remain perfectly motionless," he answered.

As if jolted by a minor shock of electricity, Pomeroy recoiled, then promptly obeyed, "What is it you want from me?" he asked in the same thin, colorless voice.

"Pomeroy, that should be obvious, even to a child. Your business is money, and that's what I want, of course. In great quantity, I might add. That's why I came to you. Now, we're going to have very little talk and lots of fast action. I want the cash in the vault safe, the big reserve supply."

"Impossible," said Pomeroy



with a firm shake of his head. "I don't have the combination."

"That's true. I'm well-informed on the operation of banks, this one in particular. It takes two officers to open your safe because each has only one half of the combination. The responsibility is shifted to a different pair each day, or week. It doesn't matter. Just pick up that phone and have those two men, whoever they are today, report to your office. Then I'll take over."

"I can't do that," said Pomeroy flatly. "The operations officer assigns the people and he's not required to give me the names."

"Don't try to stall me. If you don't know the names you can get them. You've got ten seconds, Pomeroy."

"All right, I could get those men in here for you." He leaned toward Coulter and smiled scornfully. "But it wouldn't do you any good. Because the reserve safe is time-locked until Monday morning."

"Another dodge. If that were so, you would have told me first thing. Pomeroy, I have the sudden feeling that you're a stupid man despite your lofty position. And that because you're stupidly protecting insured money, you and I are

going to die together, right here in this room." He let that sink in.

"What does that mean, we're both going to die?" Pomeroy asked in a husky voice. "What kind of threat is that?"

"It's no threat," Coulter said earnestly. "I have not the slightest wish to go on living, or to leave this bank alive unless I take the money with me. I came here, after long deliberation, prepared to die, if necessary, one second after I kill you for refusing me. Look at me, Pomeroy. Look me in the eye. Now—do I mean what I say?"

Pomeroy nodded slowly. "Yes, yes I believe you mean it."

"And are you prepared to die, Pomeroy?"

"No, certainly not." He swallowed heavily.

"All right. Then to the very last, you'll do exactly as I instruct you."

"Yes, yes indeed I will."

"Good. Now you phone the operations officer and you get those two men with the combination in here on the double. Then I'll give the orders and you'll back me up, because your life depends upon it. All right, go ahead.—And watch what you say."

Pomeroy dialed an inside number, got the names of the





men and requested that they be sent to his office at once. Barely a minute later, as Coulter waited with the gun hidden from view, there was a knock, and the two officers entered.

Pomeroy asked "Terry," a stocky balding man with a black wing of mustache, to close the door. The other man, tall and lean and blond, had a square, pushy-jawed face and strong-silent-type eyes.

"This," said Pomeroy, "is Mr. Hollander, gentlemen. I want you to listen carefully to what he has to say. And then I positively order you to do precisely what he tells you. Is that clear?"

After a moment of hesitation, the one called Terry mumbled agreement, while the blond man frowned and nodded with a narrowing of the eyes. At this point Greg Coulter introduced them to the gun and told them to stand side-by-side against the wall, just behind Pomeroy. The gun evoked from Terry a startled understanding. The other gaped, then composed his face into a mask.

"All right, you've got the message," said Greg Coulter. "It's a holdup. I want you to take this briefcase to the vault safe and fill it with *all* the bills in the reserve supply, except those in denominations below twenty. And don't try to short me, a bank this size, I'll expect at least a hundred grand. I could send just one of you with both halves of the combination, but I have an idea that would arouse suspicion. Wouldn't it, Pomeroy?"

"I think it would be wise to send both men," said the bank president.

"And since Pomeroy is anxious to go on living," said Coulter "it would also be wise not to turn in an alarm until I've left the bank with the money. Now, even without the sort of haste that will attract attention," he continued, "I figure not more than thirty seconds from here to the vault,

thirty back—one minute. I'll give you two minutes to open the safe and fill the case. A total of three minutes.

"If you're more than thirty seconds late, listen closely for the sound of two shots. The first will crash through the brain of Water Pomeroy."

"I've talked to this man and I believe him," said Pomeroy. "He's desperate and he's not bluffing. He intends to kill me and then himself if you try to cross him. As you know, the money is insured, and you're not paid to be heroes. Further, I value my life, and if you value your jobs, you won't spread the alarm until this man has left the bank with the money. You understand that, Terry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gil?"

"Yes, sir," said the blond man with the cool eyes. "But Mr. Pomeroy, I don't think we should allow this—"

"I don't care what you think, Gil. I'm in charge here and I accept the responsibility. Just follow orders."

"Very well," said Gil. "As you say, sir. But it won't work, and I'll tell you why. In the first place—"

"Shut up!" Greg Coulter said. "Will it work, Pomeroy?"

The bank president nodded. "It will work. But I wish you'd give them more time."

"Not one second," Coulter answered. "Move away, you two, over by the door." He waved the automatic. When they had obeyed, he tossed the briefcase to Terry and took up a position directly behind Pomeroy's chair, the gun barrel poking the back of his head.

"Now set your watches with mine," he said. "I have sixteen minutes before noon, you'll leave at a quarter to twelve." Terry and Gil adjusted their watches, glanced up as Coulter said, "Pomeroy will call his secretary on the intercom the instant you've gone, and he will tell her that he is not to be disturbed for any reason, that no one is to enter but you two. Should someone else open that door, I pull this trigger." He glanced at his watch. "Five seconds. And remember, you've got three minutes. Ready—go!"

They went out the door, closing it. "Now buzz your secretary," Coulter ordered. Pomeroy flipped the intercom key and spoke to the woman, his manner brusque, his voice controlled. But soon, with the gun at his head, he became pitifully nervous. He kept asking how much time had passed, and after the first couple of minutes he was actually trembling. Greg Coulter had no intention of killing anyone but himself, if it

came to that. But you had to set time limits and produce fear.

In the last ten seconds, as he was steeling himself for the worst, the pair returned abruptly, storming into the office with the briefcase, Terry placing the swollen case upon the desk.

In a sweat of anxiety, Greg Coulter said, "Spill it. Let's see what we've got."

It was not Terry, who seemed in the daze of shock; but Gil, the rugged blond with the challenging eyes, who stepped forward and reached for the briefcase. There was the shadow of something sly in his expression, and so Coulter backed off a little, taking aim at the blond man's chest.

But the case contained no hidden gun for a tricky assault, only the sweet green tickets to freedom—winking twenties, grinning fifties, and beaming hundreds, piling upon the desk in banded packets to form a splendid hill of U.S. currency.

Greg Coulter returned the barrel of the gun to Pomeroy's head and snatched up a wad of century notes, riffling the bills with his thumb. He estimated a hundred bills to the packet, or ten grand each. And since he could spot more than half a dozen packets of hundreds in the welter, apparently of the same thickness, it was a

marvelous haul even without the fifties and twenties.

"Okay," he said, "into the case with it, and hurry it up!"

Gil quickly sealed the loot inside the case and moved back to stand beside his partner.

"Now," said Coulter, "Mr. Pomeroy will escort me out of the bank. You two men will depart just ahead of us. And without a word to anyone, return to your desks. And though our association has been brief and not entirely amiable, I wish you good health and as much of this life as you can bear.

"Now—beat it! Move it! You, too, Pomeroy. I'll be at your side with the gun aimed from my pocket."

They filed out, Coulter walking on soft-rubber legs, case in left hand, gun pocketed in the right. The secretary seemed about to speak, but Pomeroy ignored her and began to walk toward the street exit where an elderly guard, little more than window-dressing, stood at parade rest.

"No," Coulter murmured, "don't you think we should take the side exit, Pomeroy? And move a little faster?" He smiled.

Pomeroy changed directions, moving briskly. At his elbow, Coulter softly said, "I want an answer to that question, and I

want you to look at me and smile."

Pomeroy turned his head, though his eyes did not meet with Coulter's.

"Ahh, yes," Pomeroy said. "I think we should take the side exit." He smiled wanly.

"And what else should we do?"

"I don't know."

"I told you."

"Oh, yes. We should move faster."

"But not too fast." Greg Coulter smiled cheerfully.

"I understand," said Pomeroy. And unsmiling, he stepped in a nervous rhythm toward the side exit. Off to the right, Coulter observed that the two bank officers, Gil and Terry, were seated at their desks, grimly watching.

It was then, as they reached the glass doors of the side exit, that Greg Coulter heard the plaintive howl of a siren. It was very close. Somewhere just outside, descending the scale, the sound ended with a menacing growl.

*They're at the curb, Greg Coulter thought. Leaping out, running!*

He pushed Pomeroy through the doors, shoved him down the arcade toward the parallel street it joined; the one from which the Global Oil Building launched itself to the Top O' the

World, forty-two stories above the city.

But they had gone only a short distance when he heard a garbled shout from behind, and glanced over his shoulder. Two uniformed cops with drawn weapons were taking aim from positions not more than a hundred feet to their rear. Apparently they had alighted in front of the bank, had passed through to the side exit, perhaps briefed in progress by Gil and Terry.

Seeing the cops, Pomeroy took courage and bolted toward them, crying his identity and pointing an accusing finger at Coulter. As one of the cops took aim at him around the approaching Pomeroy, Coulter raced on, briefcase thumping his side.

The first shot whipped past close to the left, missing him by mere inches. And then he began to zig-zag combat infantry style. So that the next shot was wild, ricochetting, zinging off with a fading whine, an angry bee on the wing.

There were a number of pedestrians in the arcade, and since he was weaving through them, further shots were impossible. But darting a look behind, he could see that the officers were loping after him, slowly gaining. And as he came upon the next street, twisting

left from the mouth of the arcade, he collided with a beefy wall of muscle and went down in a sprawl of thumping flesh and tangled limbs.

There was then a shout, some citizen bawling: "Hold that man! Hold that man for the police!" And catching on, the beefy character had snaked a thick arm about Coulter's neck, and was closing the vice to strangle him senseless.

Greg Coulter reached up, caught a mass of hair, yanked the man's head back, and punched him squarely in the mouth with all the force he could muster in that awkward crush. With an ugly sound of pain, the man released him instantly. Coulter scrambled up, snatched the case, and plunged toward that known skyscraper where he could vanish in the maize of forty-two floors.

Not more than a couple of seconds lost, though it seemed an eternity. But as he dashed into the entrance of the Global Oil Building, the lead cop of the pair was pounding toward him from the arcade.

Self-service elevators, several in a row. Of these, only one stood waiting; open maw ready to swallow him up; enclose him securely in that steel bird of flight, soaring to the heavens of escape.

Yet, even as he ran for the

car, he couldn't make up his mind. There were three men stepping into the elevator, and with the patrolmen crashing behind, they might hold him just long enough. Should he veer off and take the stairs? Or use the gun to dissuade the citizens?

It was too late to change course. The nearest cop, about fifty feet behind, and bellowing for him to halt, had pulled up short. Supporting his right wrist with his left hand, the officer was straight-arming his .38 while taking deadly aim at the easy target of Coulter's back.

And now, just a couple of long strides ahead, the elevator door was beginning to close, the three men staring, transfixed by the astonishing scene.

Instinctively, Coulter bent double, hurling himself forward in a crouch that would force the cop to lower his aim and risk shooting one of the trio of petrified observers.

A shot struck the lower portion of the closing door. He straightened suddenly, danced sideways and knifed into the car, the door shutting with a whispery thump, a second shot pelting metal harmlessly. Then they were being lifted skyward in a feathery rush which seemed to him like the wings of angels.

Gasping for breath, a hand in his pocket around the grip of

the automatic, he set the money case on the floor between his legs and exchanged looks with the men, two of them young and husky, the other middle-aged and paunchy. Though yet stunned, he could almost hear the gears shifting as they debated the wisdom of joining to overpower him, their eyes sneaking messages to one another.

Greg Coulter did not want to draw the gun in such close quarters where it could be wrenched from him, nor did he want to risk shooting one of the men in an accident resulting from a scuffle. But fortunately the car was an express, first stop tenth floor, and before the men could gather their wits for a united effort, Greg was out when it stopped on ten and leaping up the stairs.

On twelve he caught an empty local to eighteen, the first of three floors occupied by Global Oil. Here he moved at a leisurely pace to the men's room, keyed the door, entered.

Willis Segal, one of the Global Oil sales reps, was bending over a basin, washing his hands. He glanced up at Coulter in the mirror, saw a stranger, lowered his gaze and reached for a paper towel. Coulter carried the briefcase into a stall, waited until he heard Segal depart, then scoop-

ed the package from the bottom of the towel hamper.

Closed again within the stall, he swiftly peeled the brown trousers, beneath which, the pearl gray dacks were spotless. He removed the pins and let down the cuffs, fingered the cotton padding from his mouth and flushed it down the toilet.

Now he opened the package, switched from brown to black shoes, exchanged the green tie for the royal blue, the brown suitcoat for the blue-gray sport jacket, with tie-matching handkerchief in breast pocket. Next he pulled the stretch-band wig of wavy black hair down over his bald dome, tentatively fixing it in place.

With the thick clothing store wrapping paper spread open on the floor, he emptied the green beauties from the briefcase, and fed a handful of twenties to his hungry wallet. Then he packaged the loot with extreme care, tying the bundle with tight twists of the strong cord, and enough firm, professional knots to please an old sailor.

This done, he dropped the automatic into the case with the brown suit and brown shoes, green tie and handkerchief. At the last second he remembered that his reading glasses were tucked away in a pocket of the brown coat and wondered if they had broken



when he tumbled. No, they were intact; he consigned them to a pocket of the sport jacket.

All but finished, he was about to leave the stall when still another visitor arrived from Global Oil, and he had to hold until the man left. Stepping out, he lowered the briefcase to the bottom of the hamper, covering it with discards.

In the mirror he centered the wig precisely, combed it for a casual effect. There was a dark smudge on his jaw; he removed it. With a final inspection of himself, grinning at his quite handsome and youthful restoration, he departed with close to

a hundred thousand dollars concealed in the package under his arm.

Chris Emory was typing at her desk outside Welty's office, the place had emptied for lunch.

"Told you I'd be late," he said, and wanted to laugh aloud, his head bubbling with the champagne of success.

She peered at her watch. "Not quite fifteen minutes late," she announced. "And you look tickled, especially for a guy who is fresh from the torture chair of dental butchery."

"He gave me laughing gas."

"Go on!"

"No, really. I'm hysterical."

"Seriously, Greg, you look marvelous. Wouldn't know you were the same man."

"Shows that much, does it?"

"I can't get over it, Greg."

"Well, I'm not the same man, Chris. But the wound is healing. Listen, is there some place you could keep this package until we come down? I went shopping and I've been lugging the damn thing all morning."

"Give it here," she said. "I've got a big empty file drawer where I keep my pocketbook."

He knew about the hideaway and expected that she would offer it. He passed her the



innocent-looking bundle, she unlocked the bottom drawer of a steel cabinet. Out came the pocketbook, in went the package. Then she twisted the little key in the lock and said, "There, safe and sound. Shall we go?"

They took the elevator to the forty-second floor, ascending to the Top O' the World restaurant, a plush, glass-walled eyrie for panoramic viewing in the clouds, and cozy chats over buck-and-a-half drinks and gourmet foods. All of it once too steep for Coulter's lean budget, it was now the first of many golden doors to open. Ahh yes, to the bold and daring, belong the treasures in the devil's keeping.

They were ushered to a reserved corner booth with double exposure to the conquered city of dwarf people and insect vehicles below. Immediately, he ordered a couple of outsized stingers. They had not quite downed the first when he ordered another. She mildly objected to the second, asking him if he remembered the old one about drink being the enemy of the working class, or vice-versa. But she was soon so grandly hoisted above the peasant obligations of drag toil, that the third was irresistible.

And he was flying higher than the astronauts, having now

at least a hundred thousand reasons to live, regretting only that Cheryl could not be there to enjoy those reasons with him.

"This is such a delightful place," Chris was saying. "I'd come here every day if I could afford it. But then I wouldn't want to leave, just sit here and dream."

"Some of the best dreams are composed with the air of stingers," said Greg Coulter, and lifted his glass. "After this one, we'll have lunch."

She nodded. "Oh definitely lunch, for the sobering foundation. Otherwise I might stumble into the office just a wee bit plastered. But now listen, the only thing higher than this room is the tab they hand you. And since I'm one of the great unhappily employed, and you're between jobs, I think we should go Dutch."

"Very sweet, and typical of you, Chris. But no, I'm in excellent shape. You see, for years and years we lived quite frugally and put about half of our combined income into blue-chip stocks. Those investments have more than trippled and now that Cheryl is gone—well, I've cashed them in. And believe me, it's a tidy fortune."

"Greg, how marvelous! Not many people, including me, I'm



afraid, have that kind of foresight or control. I spend every dollar I earn and a few more." She flashed him one of her easy, guileless grins. "So will you buy a little time to enjoy yourself, or go back to work? What're your plans?"

"I'm off to Hawaii tonight. Taking a long vacation, may not lift a finger for a whole year."

"Hawaii? Tonight! Good Lord, Greg, I'd give both ears and an eye. Have you been there before?"

"Nope. That's why I'm going. Need a change of scenery. If I don't like it, I'll move on. Maybe to San Juan in Puerto Rico."

"Well, it couldn't happen to a nicer guy," she said with a wistful smile. "I've often thought of you, praying that it would come out all right, that you'd be happy. Under the circumstances, that is."

Lighting a cigarette, he studied her thoughtfully, admiringly. Framed by the long, polished-ebony spill of hair, her gentle, selfless face was almost beautiful.

"You have a way of saying just the right thing," he told her. "And in addition to being mighty damn pretty, you're the nicest gal still around in this lousy world. I suppose you've got boy friends in every pocket."

She chuckled. "A few, but no one special. As a matter of fact, I was hoping that one day, when you got over the dreadful feeling of loss that I know so well, you'd call me."

"Well, I did. And I'm here."

"But now you're going to Hawaii."

"Yes, that's so. I'm stale. And I must get away from here." Maybe they would not be hunting him, he thought, but he would imagine they were. And the strain would be too much.

"I'm going on vacation myself, week after next," she said. "But I'm just going to dawdle around home, perhaps visit a girl friend who lives just a block from the beach. Nothing at all exciting, not like Hawaii will be"

"Why don't you come with me?" he said quickly. The idea had crept into his mind as they were talking.

"You must be kidding!" she answered.

"No, I was never so serious. You could stay for just the two weeks of your vacation. Or, if you don't find me unbearable, you could quit and hang around indefinitely. I'd pay all the freight, naturally. Hell, we might be great for each other. And then, who knows?"

"Now wait a minute, Greg. Let me up for air. What kind of

a proposition is this?" She smiled slowly.

"No strings, no sneaky games," he said. "I like you immensely, need you as a friend. If it turns out to be more, let the chips fall."

"In that case, I'm truly flattered. I don't know if it's the stingers or my heart speaking, but I'm tempted to accept. With gratitude, dear Greg."

"Accept then! We only live once and you've got to risk an adventure now and then or stick with the walking dead of Global Oil."

"But my vacation doesn't start until next week."

"Chris, I'd wait for you. But I've made all the arrangements, and I'm steamed up to go now, not next week. You could join me, of course."

She was silent, staring down upon the city as she considered the problem. She turned to look at him, her face brightening.

"All right, then!" she said. "It won't inconvenience anyone if I move my vacation up a week. And if Welty doesn't like it, well, he knows what he can do with his job."

"Then it's settled!" he said exuberantly.

"What time does the plane leave?"

"Eight-forty."

"That doesn't give me much room to pack."

"You could pack a department store in that time, Chris."

"Yes, but maybe you can't get a seat."

"Reservation girl told me there was plenty of space. If not, we'll take the next flight out."

"Beautiful! And how deliciously exciting! Let's see, what kind of an excuse can I whip up for Welty? It would never do to tell him, or anyone else, the truth. So I'll explain that I—"

He was no longer listening. He had just spied a uniformed cop and a plainclothes type standing at the edge of the room. In a huddle with them, his squinted eyes touring the booths, was the bank officer called Gil, the blond all-American boy with the uncompromising jaw. He was the one who had probably risked, cheerfully, a hole in Pomeroy's head to play the hero and flash the alarm.

Leaving Uniform behind, Gil-baby and the plainclothes cop were coming down the aisle, scrutinizing the patrons in every booth. As they approached, Coulter pawed his pockets for the reading glasses, slipped them on for added camouflage, and grabbed the menu, a huge, glossy-thick, folded card.

They were seated side-by-side in the booth, and now he opened the menu widely, raising it to partly screen their faces.

"Chris, honey," he said, "I hate to interrupt, but don't you think we should eat something? I'm getting stoned. Here, what would you like?"

It was a bad move. They couldn't see all of his face, and frustrated, they had paused and were staring right at him. But hell, they were looking for a baldy and he had a full head of hair. So what was wrong? Could they detect the wig?

He did the only thing possible. He lowered the menu. He stared boldly and directly at them, fixing them with an expression of annoyance.

Behind the glasses, his eyes met Gil's, and fenced. It was a frightful moment.

"Sorry," said Gil, "we're searching for a friend."

"Perfectly all right," said Greg Coulter in his own rich voice, unimpeded by cotton wadding.

They moved on. Circling the room, they joined Uniform, and vanished.

He signaled the waiter, ordered a banquet of a meal for two, eating his slowly and lovingly, his sense of triumph now complete.

"I really must run," said

Chris over a creme de menthe. "I'm very late and I want to arrive before Welty, who usually takes a couple of hours. If he's irritated because I'm not Chrisy-on-the-spot, he may be difficult. But don't worry, whatever his mood, I'm going to Hawaii with you tonight. No way he can stop me."

"Good show, old girl," he quipped in a British accent. "Now look, I need that package because it contains some clothes I bought for the trip, and I want to pack them. But I have no interest in chatting with Welty, I'd just as soon avoid him. So I think I'll roost here for another belt or two, if you don't mind a lonely ride on the elevator."

"No problem," she said.

"And then," he continued, "after a bit I'll give you a ring from the public phone, and perhaps you could meet me with the package, out by the elevator."

"Glad to," she answered. "And thanks for the fabulous lunch, the whole bit." She stood, leaned over to give him a quick kiss on the cheek, and went off with a wave.

Coulter nursed another drink, ordered coffee, smoked a small chain of cigarettes. Peering out at the misty spires of the city, he was thinking that you could do anything, fight

the whole world and win, if you were programmed to be unafraid of death, of putting your life on the line.

When an hour had passed and he guessed the hunters had dispersed in despair of catching the hunted in a cave of forty-two stories, he paid the check and phoned Chris. Her chirpy voice implied good tidings; he told her he would meet her at the elevators, he was on his way.

He rode down to eighteen and waited until Chris came bouncing along with the glorious package, wearing a smile that wouldn't quit.

"Old Welty said I could go!" she announced as she passed him the disguised fortune. "He's going to let me off an hour early in the bargain. Love that Welty! I mean, at the moment, he looks pretty good to me."

"Crazy," he said. "All the cards are turning up aces. I'll call you if there's any problem getting you a seat on the plane, otherwise, I'll pick you up in a cab at seven on the nose. Might as well launch ourselves with a couple at the airport, huh?"

"Oh, that's cool, that's far out," she said. "I'll give you my address."

He stood by the elevator bank until she had gone, then he returned to the men's room

and recovered the briefcase. He estimated that perhaps one out of every three of the employees in the building carried a case quite similar to his, not to mention visiting salesmen coming and going. It was just another briefcase, and unless toted by a certain bald man in a brown suit, it should suggest nothing more sinister than commercial enterprise. Anyway, it was hours after the robbery, and there were certain calculated risks.

On the ground floor he mingled with others leaving the building, walking casually behind a guy who was also supporting a tan-leather briefcase. As he reached the street he spied a pair of men loitering about who had the look of plainclothes cops, their faces intent, eyes alert. But they onced him over and passed him by.

He caught a taxi home, reserved space for Chris on the eight-forty with no trouble. He then counted the money. It came to one hundred and seven thousand, four hundred and sixty dollars, excluding the bills he had skimmed from the top. To the twenties in his wallet, he added enough to pay the plane fares, then locked the loot inside one of the two suitcases he was taking to Hawaii,

covering it with the brown suit and accessories.

He watched the six o'clock news. It contained a lead story about the robbery, "...committed by a bald, well-dressed man in his mid fifties, and executed with the cunning genius of a master criminal. The bald gunman, escaping in a hail of police bullets, fled to the Global Oil Building, and easily vanished in a labyrinth of offices."

Coulter was amused by the story, then sobered by the thought that he still had to dispose of the automatic. He couldn't take it with him on the plane, and didn't want to leave it behind. So he put the gun in his pocket and hiked a few blocks to the center of a high bridge across a deep river. Alone and unobserved, he dropped the weapon into the water, and headed home.

He taxied to pick up Chris at her home, laden down with suitcases and in a gleeful mood, they went on to the airport, arriving with more than an hour to spare. Coulter bought the tickets, delivered the baggage to the clerk. Then he watched the green blood of his life, the hundred grand suitcase, as it was gobbled up by a conveyor belt to the loading crew.

Then, peering through the glass of a lounge suspended

above the field, they were sipping Manhattans. The late darkness of summer was closing in. Huge, shadowy birds with wink-lighted wings and tails and beaming eyes, sprang shrieking into the sky, belching flame and smoke. Or descended from the heavens to swoop down the runways and then nose about ponderously in search of a nest.

"I used to come down and just watch them glide away," said Chris. "Going, going, gone. To some mysterious place where I imagined that people do nothing but laze around on toasty beaches. Or sit with cool, exotic drinks on about an acre of yacht, while being served by stewards in glistening white jackets. And all the bronzed, healthy, happy couples were wild about each other. And when they weren't laughing like crazy, they were making love."

He chuckled delightedly. "That's the way they picture Hawaii," he said. "Well, almost."

"Whatever it's like," she said, "I'm through with being a spectator, just watching life come and go from the wrong side of the glass. I can hardly wait to be up, up and awa-a-a-y. I don't know when I've felt so—"

"Ecstatic?"

"That's it. Positively ecstatic!

"I'll drink to that. One more for the sky?"

"Mmm, yes. At least one more. For the sky."

THE MONSTROUS, four-engine jet had taxied down the runway and was pivoting into the wind. The plane was filled to little more than half of capacity. They were belted in snugly, close together, Coulter seated at a window behind what seemed a quarter mile expanse of silver wing. They could trade seats later, Chris had said. Take-offs made her nervous and she would prefer to fly blind during the ascent.

Three Manhattans had loosened Coulter until boarding time, when he became gut-hollowed and muscle-coiled. As the passengers had their carry-on possessions inspected, their persons screened by metal detectors, he was afraid that, having given himself away by some unimaginable goof, his identity had been learned. And one one of those armed, watchful inspectors would yank him from the line.

The whole business was rather casual, and he received no special attention. So that now he felt the abundant relief of a man who has twice been delivered from death; once saved from suicide by the ringing of a phone, rescued

again by good fortune as he dodged bullets in the course of a robbery. And walked away with one hundred and seven thousand-plus green ones with which to survive joyously.

Moments from leaping skyward for the non-stop, trans-oceanic skip to Hawaii, it was a very good thing to be alive.

They began to scoot along the runway, gathering momentum as the torching jets hissed and whined, and with a screeching blast of power, shoved them airborne.

"Good-by, cruel world," mocked Greg Coulter as the lights of the city sank beneath them and became mere ornaments scattered across the night. Beside him, Chris opened fear-tight eyes and smiled.

In only a minute the coast was receding, while far below the deceptive pancake of the black-face ocean was formless, an enormous void. There was now a pressure at the ear drums, a shift in the pitch of sound, as the engines gentled, settling down.

"I wish," said Coulter, "that they would wipe the seat belt and no smoking sign, and turn us loose to have a puff and a drink in the lounge. Now here this" he mimed sonorously, "the smoking lamp is lit." He chuckled. "And so am I."

"I could use another drink," said Chris. "I'm cool enough in level flight, but taking off and sliding down gives me the shakes."

Greg Coulter turned to the window. Looking out and down, he was confused. In the distance below the wing-span, he could again see the coastline, a white-wink or surf, a twinkle of lights. Instead of receding, the shore was now approaching.

"That's odd," he said. "I didn't notice, thought we were maneuvering to get on course. But now we seem to be moving inland, turning back."

"How strange," said Chris with a puzzled frown.

There was then the electronic crackle of the P.A. system, and the nerveless monotone of the captain's voice filled the speakers with an unnerving explanation. There was a problem with one of the engines, he said. Nothing to be alarmed about, they could continue flying indefinitely. Nevertheless, in accordance with safety regulations, they were returning to the airport. If the trouble could not be quickly overcome, the passengers would be assigned to another flight. "Thank you for your patience," he concluded. "Please remain in your seats and follow the instructions of your stewardess."

For a second there, Greg Coulter had almost believed him. But now with a jolt, he got the drift. Luck, grinning in his face, cheering him on, had finally stabbed him in the back. Somewhere, somehow, he had fumbled. And even as the plane was taking off, they were connecting him to the robbery. Telling the pilot to cover with a tale of engine trouble, they had ordered the plane back to the airport. There, with no fuss or public display, they would quietly place him under arrest.

He looked out again. The coast was gone, his wing was slightly uptilted. They were slowly circling. A stewardess, looking grim, but still pretty in her snappy uniform and perky cap, was approaching from the cockpit area, stepping rapidly down the aisle. Merely to check her reaction, to him, he asked her what was going on.

"Nothing to worry about, sir." She was leaning toward him over Chris, her expression impersonal as a stone wall. "They're having a little trouble with number three, that's all."

"Number three engine?"

"Yes, they had to shut it down."

He tried to remember how it went. You counted from left to right, so number three would be the inboard engine to starboard. Since he was on the port side



and couldn't leave his seat, he was still in the dark.

"Why are we circling?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. I know that we're dumping fuel, and at the same time, we may be in a holding pattern while we get clearance for an emergency landing."

"Dumping fuel? For God's sake, why?"

"Well, there's what they call an allowable gross landing weight. Since we just took off with a load of fuel, we're too heavy to land safely until we dump a good half of our supply."

He was beginning to believe her, was about to ask another question when she said, "Listen, I'm busy just now, I have to go. Excuse me." She went off briskly.

"Are we going to be all right?" Chris said anxiously.

"Sure, nothing serious. Relax, honey. Those boys in the cockpit know what they're doing, you bet."

In a minute another stewardess who looked older, came hustling out from the forward section. Demonstrating, she repeated in more detail, the instructions already given at take-off on how to wear and inflate the life preservers under the seats; how to pull down and adjust oxygen masks to faces.

She bared her teeth often in an attempt to seem pleasant and unconcerned, though she spoke in a rush, and there was the frightful insinuation of disaster, with time running out.

At last she made a matter-of-fact announcement to the effect that the plane should be landing in a few minutes and that all passengers were to exit at once in orderly fashion, sliding down the four rubberized-plastic escape chutes to the ground. She gushed on, designating which groups were to go to what exits, and so forth. Then she was gone, leaving Coulter with the absolute conviction that he had been wrong, it was no cover-up for the sake of hauling him back to police custody. The cover-up was of some real danger that might cause the passengers to panic.

For an interval they continued in level flight, then suddenly, the plane seemed to be standing almost on one wing. They were looking straight down at the shoreline from a much lesser height; and at the same time the plane was slowly falling off center, nosing over in a heady, gut-heaving, gradually sharpening dive. There was a sound of rushing wind, the spaced clatter of objects falling within the plane.

In that instant Chris Emory



looked directly at him and valiantly, smiled tremulously, her sad eyes resigned. *Good-by*, they said, though she spoke not a word.

All that happened next was telescoped in his mind, a shocking montage of events that numbed his awareness. The dive did not steepen as he expected it would. Instead it diminished slowly, and before he understood that it was purposefully accomplished to lose altitude quickly for a fast, urgent descent to earth, they were skimming over roof tops just below. And in seconds they were settling, settling, tires hard-thumping the runway—rolling, rolling.

In another half minute he was sliding down an escape chute just behind Chris. And caught by the crowd-fever of terror, the sight of fire-fighting equipment, ambulances and other emergency vehicles ringing the scene, he was racing with Chris and a tight wad of others, away from the plane.

Pausing breathless at a considerable distance, they turned to watch the captain and crew come trotting up, the captain and his co-pilot halting just beside them to gaze back at the plane, their terse answers to questions from passengers, revealing the story.

Apparently, number three startling possibility had over-

engine had been overheating and had caught fire. When they tried to extinguish the fire, there was a mal-function in the mechanism that released a spray of carbon dioxide. Something like that, Greg Coulter couldn't quite follow it. Anyway, the flames could not be smothered, and it was necessary to bring the plane down in all possible haste.

And now, as the fire engines began to move in to flood the plane with foam, Coulter could see the fiery tongues curling from the vent of number three, extending and widening to surround the nacelle of the engine.

Just then, with a *whumph* of sound and exploding flame, the big plane was consumed by fire which spread nose-to-tail like a five-second powder fuse, fire and smoke mushrooming high into the air. And though the engines, first spraying from a cautious removal, then closing in somewhat, fought furiously for control, the plane was a charcoal shambles before they could contain the fire.

As the captain and his officers cursed and groaned over the cremation of their plane, Greg Coulter had been congratulating himself upon once again having lucked out.

But now the horror of a

taken him, and he turned abruptly to the pilot.

"Captain!" he cried hysterically, "what about our luggage! Will it be okay? I mean, the fire couldn't have reached it, certainly."

The captain, tall and quite distinguished-looking, gazed at Greg with astonishment. His expression said it was an idiot question.

"The luggage compartment," he said stiffly, "is situated in what is known as the wing route, sir, directly in the path of the dire. What is left of the luggage will be little better than a small mountain of ashes, I'm afraid. The insurance will cover it, however. Forgive me, sir, but you're mighty damn lucky to be alive. Baggage containing a few expendable items of clothing and what-not, can be replaced. Humans, never."

With a shake of the head, the captain turned away.

"You know," said Chris, "he's right. Who cares about the silly old luggage! We're alive, and nothing else matters." She stared off at the fire-torn waste of the plane. "Really, Greg, when you think what we came through, isn't it great to be alive!"

He gazed at her dumbly, thinking that what he had left from that whole incredible life-or-death gamble, was just the handful of twenties in his wallet.

"Don't look so mortally wounded," she was saying. "Greg, you have to be a good sport and just shrug it off. A little inconvenience, yes. But so what? We'll simply have a couple of drinks while we wait for them to put us on the next flight to Hawaii."

"Listen, Greg," Chris went on, "it's all part of the game, and we won't let it spoil our fun. Okay?"

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Next Month:

## Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

### WHO KILLED VIVIAN GORDON?

*Up in the Bronx, the queen of the harlots lay sprawled in ugly death. Downtown, in the Tenderloin and in the plush "houses" midtown, men lived in fear. Who had killed Vivian Gordon—and why? Time and half a century later, men are still seeking the real answer.*

by DAVID MAZROFF

# *To Die In Spain*



She had everything. Looks, wealth—and the soul of a merciless killer, Could I find her?

**by ARNOLD MARMOR**

THE SKY was charcoal gray; the overcast was heavy and the rain was building up, ready to burst from its shield of clouds. The man in the oyster-white raincoat ducked into the cab, gave the cabbie an address and tried to settle back.

The man was close to fifty with hazel eyes and dark brown hair. He was a slight man, the

type who stayed in the back of the elevator, out of sight.

The cab purred away, nosing through light traffic.

"Is it far?" the man asked.

"Naw," the cabbie said. "The Gold Hill section? It's not even a mile."

The man paid the driver when they got to their destination. He walked briskly

along the flagstone path, knocked on the front door of the two-story house and looked upwards at the now threatening sky.

The door was opened and the man walked in. A green gray carpet covered the floor of the foyer. There was a small English table under an amber-tinted wall mirror.

"I know it was unexpected hearing from me," the man said.

Claude Summerhil closed the front door. "I had nearly forgotten. Let me have your raincoat, Mr. Greene."

Claude Summerhill was a strong-looking man with very wide, almost massive, shoulders. He was handsome in a rugged way; his skin was tanned and his hair was sandy. He was nearly forty.

They walked into the spacious front room. There was a three sectional skirted with chintz, two marble-topped end tables, a matching cocktail table, an easy chair, a leather recliner, an overstuffed club chair, and a wall-to-wall pile rug.

"Sit down, Mr. Greene."

Jason Greene sat, his hands folded on his lap. He shook his head at the suggestion of a drink. Jason Greene didn't need notes; everything was in his head.

"It's been a long time," he said.

"Yes, a long time," Summerhill intoned. He sat down. He didn't know what to do with his hands.

"A year ago," Jason Greene said, "you hired my agency to investigate the death of your brother, who met with an accident on his honeymoon in Spain."

"Yes." Claude Summerhill nodded his head. "I was suspicious of—uh—my sister-in-law."

"And we made a thorough investigation," Jason Greene said. "Very thorough. I personally led the investigation."

"And you gave my sister-in-law a clean bill. You told me there was no reason to suspect her. That was many months ago."

"Yes." Jason Greene sighed as if he had a painful duty to perform. "But I was never one hundred percent satisfied. Recently, I had to return to Spain on business. A missing portfolio. While there, after finding the portfolio, I spent some time retracing my earlier steps concerning your brother's death. I hit it lucky. A witness who was bribed by your sister-in-law. Or ex-sister-in-law. Your brother was definitely murdered by his wife."

Summerhill licked his lips

nervously. "There's no doubt about this?"

"I have all the evidence we need."

"What—what are you going to do with it?"

"Turn it over to you," Jason Greene said. "You retained my firm. It will be up to you to do what you want with it. It will be mailed to you directly I get back to my office. I was passing through, on my way to Chicago, and decided I would stop by and see you."

"I'm glad you did, Mr. Greene."

But Claude Summerhill didn't sound glad and Jason Greene understood why. The shock, the terrible shock. First, he had told his client that his brother had died in an accident, now he had come to tell him that this wasn't so, that the brother had been murdered by his wife.

"I need a drink," Claude Summerhill declared. He walked to a portable bar and built himself something in a tall frosted glass. "It's hard to believe," he said. "Have you ever met Myra Summerhill? In the course of your investigations, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, but she didn't know who I was. A charming, beautiful creature. I can understand how your brother fell in love with her. I suppose it



would be hard for any man not to."

"You're sure you won't have a drink?"

"Quite sure." Jason Greene got to his feet. "I won't take up any more of your time."

"You'll send me the bill."

"Oh, no," Jason Greene said. "There is no extra charge. I'm only too glad to rectify an earlier mistake." He edged to the door. "I'm truly sorry the news I brought you is such unhappy news. But I'm sure you wanted the truth."

"Oh, yes. I—I have to act accordingly."

In the foyer, Jason Greene was handed his raincoat. The door was opened for him and

he slipped out. Claude Summerhill closed the door and Greene stepped gingerly out on the sidewalk. No, it hadn't started raining yet. If he could only get to the bus depot before the rains came.

A beautiful woman parked her car outside the house and climbed out. Jason Greene looked at her. Familiar face. But it couldn't possibly be. But it was.

The woman shut the car door and started for the house.

"I beg your pardon," Jason Greene said.

The woman stopped.

"Aren't you Myra Summerhill?"

"Why, yes." The woman had a winning smile.

"I—I knew your husband, Peter."

The smile vanished. "Did you? That seems such a long

time ago. Peter Summerhill is dead."

"I know."

"You do look a bit familiar," Myra said.

"We met. Once or twice. Briefly."

"Are you a friend of the family?" she asked. "You knew my first husband, Peter, and it seems you also know my second husband."

"Is Claude Summerhill your husband?"

"Yes. I suppose he took pity on me, the grieving widow. We're very happy." She smiled brightly.

"I see a cab coming. If you'll excuse me." Jason Greene waved his hand frantically, stopped the cab, and hopped in. He told the driver to take him to the bus depot and tried to settle back.

It started to rain.



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Next Month:

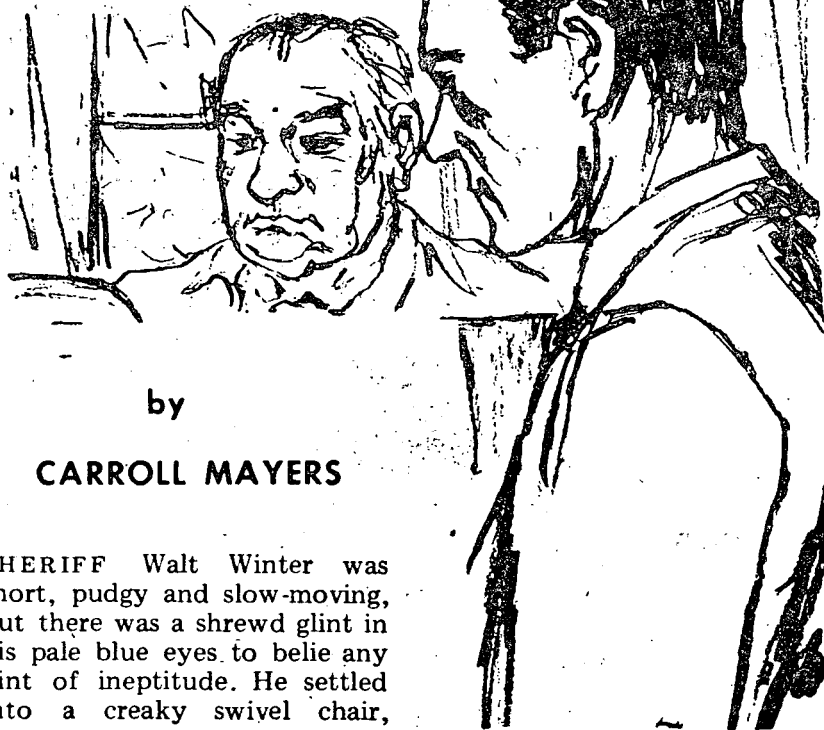
## ESCAPE ME NEVER

A New JOHNNY HAWK Novelet

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

# DEGREE OF GUILT

*There were only two things  
wrong with her polite roomer. He  
was an escaped bank rob-  
ber—and extremely dead...*



by

**CARROLL MAYERS**

SHERIFF Walt Winter was short, pudgy and slow-moving, but there was a shrewd glint in his pale blue eyes to belie any hint of ineptitude. He settled into a creaky swivel chair,



flapped one palm at his littered desk top.

"Paper work," he apologized with a wry smile. "I took ten days off two months ago to go up to New York for a peace officers' convention, haven't been truly caught up since." He sobered, examined my insurance investigator credentials. "I suspect you're here because of Frank Brown, Mr. Engles?"

I was. Three nights back, a young man in his middle twenties had been found dead on his bed by his landlady, a widow named Emma Graham. Mrs. Graham had promptly phoned Sheriff Winter, who in turn had summoned the town's part-time coroner and full-time mortician. That gentleman's professional examination had determined the youth's death to be due to a sudden coronary seizure.

Unfortunately, in setting up the inquest as mandatory in a case with no medical attention, specific information on the victim, such as next of kin, previous address, was not available. Nothing in his room or on his person provided any lead. Sheriff Winter had thereupon taken fingerprints, journeyed to the county seat and had the prints wired to Washington. The resultant run-down had brought me flying to Sea Harbor.

"That's correct, Sheriff," I answered my host's query. "But there's a kicker. I've already been trying to locate your Frank Brown because he actually was one Fred Barlow, an employee of a New England savings and loan company. Eight weeks ago he simply walked off the job, along with nine thousand dollars of the firm's cash."

Winter said mildly, "He didn't have that kind of money on him when he died. And I don't believe it was stashed anywhere in his room. I checked pretty thoroughly."

I said, "Barlow could have temporarily stowed the money in any deposit box between here and Maine."

"But you don't think he did?"

"Frankly, no," I said. "Neither does my employer. That's why I'd like your permission to conduct an investigation of sorts of my own."

"You think somebody here in Sea Harbor—somebody Barlow got to know—is responsible for the money's disappearance?"

"It's an angle to check out, Sheriff."

Winter sighed. "Seems like an odd case all around," he commented. "First off, nine thousand is a damned small

amount to skip with." He shoved back his chair. "I'll be interested in anything you dig up. You have transportation?"

His tacit approval of my investigation was gratifying.

"I've rented a car," I said. "I'll keep in touch. Where do I find Mrs. Graham?"

Winter gave me directions to the widow's home, then stopped me as I turned to leave. "You'll find she's rather a remarkable woman, Engles. She's suffered from arthritis for years, lost both her husband and sister in a car crash ten months ago. But she didn't let that crush her. She took her sister's son in with her until he could set up his own quarters, began renting out her spare room for income."

The sheriff shot me a significant look. "I wouldn't want anyone coming on too strong with her."

"Nobody will, Sheriff," I assured him. In all truth, I'd mentioned Emma Graham first only because I felt she could best fill me in concerning Fred Barlow's activities and possible associations since coming to town, perhaps confirm some personal traits I'd learned.

That personal angle was scant. Twenty-six and unmarried, Barlow had been a true loner, living by himself in a residential hotel. Studious and

industrious, he'd been well-regarded by his fellow workers at the savings and loan company, but he hadn't mingled, appeared to have no intimate friends. His work record had been excellent, although a history of heart disease accounted for some absenteeism.

Emma Graham graciously made me comfortable in the neat living room of her modest frame bungalow. She was a frail, gray-haired woman in her early sixties, and the swollen knuckles of thin hands, the obvious favoring of stiff knees attested to the distress Sheriff Winter had cited.

For all her affliction, she was most pleasant, her gray eyes pert behind thick lenses.

"I'm afraid I can't be of too much help," she told me after I'd apologized for interrupting her morning, explained my visit. "Mr. Brown—or Barlow, did you say?—kept very much to himself. He liked to read, work mathematical puzzles."

"He didn't spend any time in town?"

"Only to take his meals. Of course, I suspect he went to the movies now and then. And he once asked directions to the library."

"Nobody ever visited him here, in his room?"

She shook her head. "I'd say

no, but I can't be sure. You see, my spare room is at the back, and when I decided to rent it out I had it remodeled, with a bath and private entrance. So Mr. Barlow could have had visitors without me seeing them."

"Or when you weren't home."

"Yes. But I seldom go out, except for a treatment for my arthritis. That's how it was the night I discovered the body. I'd just come back from Dr. Burroughs, remembered I hadn't provided Mr. Barlow with fresh towels."

I stood up. "Please don't disturb yourself, Mrs. Graham, but if I may I'd like to see Fred Barlow's room."

"Of course. Just down the hall."

Viewing young Barlow's quarters was merely a case of tagging all the bases. Sheriff Winter already had inspected the room; I hardly expected to come up with anything new.

I didn't. The room was plain, clean, functional: bed, easy chair, reading lamp, bureau. Nothing significant in the bureau drawers, closet or adjoining bath. A few news magazines, a spate of travel folders. The latter might have held meaning, but were inconclusive.

Back in the living room, I

thanked Emma Graham for her kindness, let myself out. Settling behind the wheel of my car, I felt vaguely disturbed. The woman had been gracious and pleasant, apparently anxious to answer my questions, but somehow I'd felt she'd been less than completely frank, had held something back. Sheriff Winter's esteem notwithstanding, I wondered.

It was now almost noon. I decided to rustle up a bit of lunch, then spend the afternoon circulating among the townfolk, try to develop some leads to Fred Barlow's obviously limited activity.

The Blue Bell diner was bustling at the hour. In addition, service appeared momentarily impaired with the only counter girl, a perky blonde with the name tag *Betty* pinned to her crisp uniform, engaged in an intensive discussion with a lanky, good-looking youth her own age. As I snagged a stool, the girl terminated the conversation. "I can't say now. If you'd care to stop over tonight, we'll talk it out."

The blue plate special of liver and onions was appealing; I gave attractive Betty my order, ate slowly as I pondered my overall situation. If only I had something tangible to concentrate on.

A remark Mrs. Graham had interposed registered. Nothing definitive in itself, but an advancement of sorts, a slight fleshing out of the case. Paying my check, I questioned the counter girl as to the location of the public library, drove to that institution.

The bespectacled matron at the desk informed me that she knew Emma Graham as a member of the community, but she had not heard of the sudden death of Mrs. Graham's roomer. Glimpsing a company photo I'd obtained at the outset of my investigation, she recognized Fred Barlow as a recent patron of the library, although she had not been aware of his identity, or that he was the young man who'd taken Emma Graham's spare room.

"He never actually took out any books so I didn't know his name, but he did quite a bit of reading here, took extensive notes."

"Notes, ma'am?"

"Yes. He always had a small memo book."

"I see. Those books he was interested in; could they have been about gambling? Horse racing, anything like that?"

The lady nodded. "I suppose you might consider them such, indirectly. They were textbooks on mathematics, especially arithmetical progression, nu-



merical probabilities, that sort of thing."

I thanked my informant, made my exit. It was time for a reprise with Sheriff Winter. First, though, I hunted up a public phone, made one additional inquiry.

The pudgy lawman put aside his pen as I entered the office. "Busy morning?"

"Moderately so. Profitable too, I think."

"Oh?" The swivel chair creaked as he leaned back.

"I'd like to fill you in," I said. "I'd appreciate your own thoughts."

Winter's pale eyes were intent; he made no comment.

"To start," I went on,

"everything I've come up with about Fred Barlow suggests he was a model citizen. Intelligent. Sober. Diligent. No vices. He may have been a bit odd in that he was a loner with no special girl, no true male friends, but that doesn't alter the fact he led a moral, routine life."

Winter grunted. "Maybe too routine?"

"My notion also," I said. "Suppose one day Barlow suddenly senses he's on a treadmill, going nowhere. Ordinarily, he'd shuck the oppression. But today he doesn't, or he can't."

"The mood holds; he begins to brood. Finally, maybe days later, he decides to take a big step, change his whole mode of existence. He steals nine thousand dollars from his firm's till, disappears. The fact that he took only a relatively small amount reflects, I think, on his innate moral character. He took only what he felt necessary to spark his plan."

"Which was?"

"I believe he meant to amass sizable funds for his new life by gambling. The nine thousand he stole was his initial stake."

Winter was listening intently. "Anything to substantiate all that?"

I told him of my library visit.

"Plenty of gamblers are

system players," I said. "I think Barlow meant to tip the odds in his favor by developing a system of his own. He studied pertinent data at the library, worked out his own calculations in his room. Mrs. Graham assumed they were 'mathematical puzzles'."

Winter muttered, "You're still reaching."

"There were some travel folders in Barlow's room, Sheriff. One of them featured San Juan, and gambling's legal in Puerto Rico. He could have meant to get out of the country when the heat for his apprehension died down."

I paused, added, "I can't picture him confiding in anyone, but suppose somebody here somehow got wind of his travel plans, began wondering? I mean, here's a stranger in town who keeps to himself who has designs to leave the country. The whole bit could suggest furtive cash."

"You still feel he had the money with him in his room?"

"I do," I said. "I just called your local bank, asked them to check. There's no deposit box in the name of Frank Brown. And under the identity Barlow had assumed, he'd almost have to use that name."

Winter tented stubby fingers. "Anything else?"

"Yes; I don't believe Emma

Graham told me everything she knows."

His gaze chilled. "You mean she lied?"

"I didn't say that. I only said I feel she held out on me."

"And you mean to press her about it?"

"Essentially, yes."

His frosty look held; abruptly, he shoved erect. "Come on."

We took the sheriff's official car. Emma Graham admitted us with all the graciousness she'd exhibited earlier.

"It's nice to see you again, Walter," she told Winter, addressing him as an old friend.

The sheriff was uncomfortable as he balanced his bulk on the edge of an overstuffed chair.

"It's my pleasure too, Emma," he said. Then, flicking a tight look at me, he went on, "I don't know how to get at this except to say it flat out. Mr. Engles talked to you this morning about this Fred Barlow business. He—well, he's under the impression you could have told him more than you did."

For a long moment Emma Graham made no reply, thin fingers interlacing tightly. Then she bowed her head. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "I knew it would have to come out eventually, but I just couldn't—"

She broke off, lifted her eyes

to meet the sheriff's. "I'm not positive, but I—I think Andy was here that night.

I traded a glance with Winter.

"Andrew Clay," he told me. "Her nephew."

Emma Graham was again studying the carpeting. "It wasn't to deliver fresh towels that took me to Mr. Barlow's room that night. I'd taken a taxi back from the doctor's, had just started up the front walk when somebody, a man, ran from the back of the house. It was dark; I caught only a glimpse as he ran across the back lot."

"But it could have been your nephew?" I pressed.

"Yes. Whoever it was had the same height and build."

The sheriff was even more uncomfortable; he cleared his throat. "We'll talk to Andy."

Her lips twitched. "I can't believe Andrew is a thief, Walter."

"Don't get upset until we hear his story, Emma," Winter counselled. "He still may not be involved. He arose from the chair, patted her hand in an awkward but sincere gesture, then nodded to me and we left.

Back in the car, the sheriff settled heavily. "Anything you dug up today suggest Clay may have tabbed your man, visited him that night?"

There wasn't. I said as much. Winter sighed, switched on the ignition, drove to a midtown garage where Andrew Clay worked as a mechanic. It developed our paths already had crossed; I recognized him as the lanky young man who'd been engaged in fervent discussion with the counter girl at the Blue Bell diner.

When Winter came to the point of our presence, Clay was adamant in his disavowal of any complicity. I took over briefly.

"Your aunt says the intruder she glimpsed running away could have been you."

"She's mistaken. I wasn't there."

"Do you need money for something?"

"Everybody needs money."

"You didn't know Fred Barlow?"

The youth's lean jaw set. "I'd seen him in and out of a few places, the same as anybody else. I understood his name was Frank Brown. I never even spoke to him."

There was more, but finally Winter conceded a standoff.

"All right, Andy; that'll be all for now," he said. "Just keep yourself available."

After the sheriff had ferried me back to my own car and I in turn had returned to the hotel to freshen up before dinner, a sudden idea glimmered. It was

sparked, I guess, by the conviction I still held that Barlow would not have confided his true identity to anyone, revealed he possessed considerable funds.

Opposed to that conviction, of course, was the simple alternative that Barlow had been recognized by someone. After two months I tended to discount that possibility Barlow's picture had been in the newspapers at the time of his disappearance, but it had not been featured for several weeks, and whatever had happened here at Sea Harbor had transpired only three nights ago. Again, though, if the intruder Mrs. Graham had glimpsed had not been after the nine thousand dollars—

That was when the idea burgeoned. It was an offbeat hunch, but valid and dovetailing with the elements I knew. I phoned the desk, was informed the local movie theatre opened at seven. I used the intervening time to shower, change linen, stretch out on the bed and elaborate on my notion. I forgot about dinner. At ten past the hour, I was at the box office of the Jewel.

The miss in the booth was a trim redhead. Her green eyes widened and she bobbed her head emphatically as I showed her my photo of Fred Barlow.



"Sure, I recognize him," she told me. "He's been here several times with a girl I know."

"Would your friend's name be Betty?"

"That's right, mister. Betty Purcell. She's counter girl at the Blue Bell. She met that fellow at the diner a month ago. Brown, I think Betty said his name is."

It was evident the young lady was yet to learn of 'Brown's' untimely demise. I thanked her, got to a phone, located Sheriff Winter's home number in the directory.

"Engles, Sheriff. Are you free?"

"You've got something?"

"I may have. I'd like you along when I try to nail it down. Give me directions and I'll come by."

Winter's look was quizzical as he eased his bulk onto the cushions a few moments later. "What came up?"

I said, "What do you know about the counter girl at the Blue Bell diner?"

"Betty Purcell? Darned nice person. Quiet. Dependable. Lives with her father; he's swing-shift foreman at the chemical plant. Her mother's dead. Why?"

"I think she's the heart of our problem," I said. "How do we get to her place?"

The Purcell home was a neat

white cottage at the east end of town. Apprised to a degree of my intent, the sheriff appeared satisfied to await developments, did not prod me. He did indicate some surprise, however, when Betty Purcell ushered us inside and he recognized her visitor. For my part, from the brief interlude I'd caught at the Blue Bell I'd anticipated Andrew Clay's presence.

The girl said, "I'm sorry, Sheriff Winter. Dad's at the factory."

"I know, Betty." Winter eyed her caller briefly, then gave the ball to me. "This's Mr. Engles. He'd like to talk to you."

"That's true," I said. "But first I'm wondering if your friend would care to amend the statement he gave us earlier today."

Andrew Clay had hung back, uncertain. Now a harried look began to show in his dark eyes. He said tautly, "No, I wouldn't."

I said, "You're lying again, Andy. You were in Barlow's room that night. You didn't know about the money he had hidden there, but you discovered it. It was too much to ignore. You pocketed it. Then when Barlow returned unexpectedly, you had no alternative. You knocked him down,

fled." I paused. "I'd say you didn't learn until later that he'd suffered a fatal coronary in the excitement, collapsed on his bed."

"No!"

"We'll prove it when we come up with the money at your place," I said. "I imagine Miss Purcell can confirm the real reason you were searching Barlow's room."

The girl's breasts lifted as my gaze included her. "I—I don't understand, Andy and I had a quarrel, but—"

"I'd venture it was over Fred Barlow," I said. "You'd been Andy's girl, but you'd stopped seeing him in favor of Barlow. Barlow had come to town, was taking his meals at the diner. He was an introverted type, shy with girls, but he was attracted to you and you to him."

Momentarily, her eyes were challenging; then she looked away.

"It's true," she said. "I did break off with Andy; we both said some unpleasant things. But now that poor Fred's gone, we thought tonight we might talk about picking up again."

Intensity laced her tone. "But I don't understand the rest of what you're saying and I know Andy's no thief!"

Abruptly, young Clay capitulated.

"All right," he blurted,

mouth corners white. "I was there that night. Betty and Barlow were seeing each other. I'd never confronted him directly, but I was jealous, and I also began to wonder about him. He'd shown up out of the blue, taken Mrs. Graham's room. Except for meals, or when he began squiring Betty to the movies, he seemed to keep to himself. I began to suspect there might be something shady in his background. That's why I went to his room when I learned he and Betty had a movie date. I wanted to see if I could find anything among his effects, maybe something incriminating"

The youth stopped, grim look taking in both the sheriff and myself. "But I didn't hit him. I swear it. He hadn't left for that movie date. He was sprawled across the bed when I slipped inside and I recognized he was dead. The next moment I heard a car stop outside. I panicked and ran. And I didn't take any money. I didn't even know there was any."

The sheriff's pale eyes regarded Clay.

"I'll still have to take you in, Andy," he said, "and check out your place."

It wasn't pleasant, any of it. Young Clay continued to profess his innocence as we journeyed to the sheriff's office

and Winter lodged him in a cell.

Twenty minutes later, the sheriff and I had thoroughly searched Andy's living quarters, had come up with nothing.

"Could be he told us the truth," Winter muttered, obviously unhappy and uncertain. "Maybe there was somebody else onto Barlow, as you theorized earlier."

I had to be realistic.

"The money doesn't have to be here, Sheriff," I said. "I only intimated as much to watch his reaction. He could have stashed it anywhere, maybe the garage."

Winter's pudgy features were set. "I'll have another session with him in the morning."

With that, we called it a night. I drove the sheriff home, then back to my hotel, hit the sack early. But I couldn't sleep; the case bugged me. I kept turning the bits and pieces over in my mind, speculating. Finally, close to midnight, I got up, made a phone call.

Sheriff Winter's heavy shoulders slumped tiredly as he greeted me in the morning. "He still sticks to his story. If nothing else, I've got to charge him with that breaking and entering, but dammit, Engles, considering his aunt, I hate to move ahead."

I took the visitor's chair.

"I called Dr. Burroughs last

night," I said. "Got him out of bed, in fact."

The sheriff blinked. "Oh?"

"He told me he's been urging Emma Graham for some time to move to a drier climate for her arthritis. The trouble is, a shift like that would take more resources than she has."

Winter regarded me stolidly.

"Nine thousand isn't a great amount," I went on, "but it would help, enable her to establish the same sort of setup she has now."

The sheriff sat impassively at his desk, but a vein began pulsing in his left temple. After a long moment, he said quietly, "So you know. How?"

"The money was missing. If Andy Clay hadn't taken it, hadn't even known about it as he claimed, and if Barlow hadn't temporarily cached it somewhere else, which we'd discounted, it followed somebody else here in town was in the picture. I couldn't figure who or how. Barlow's photo had been in the metropolitan newspapers at the time of his skip, but not for several weeks back, and certainly not down here. I couldn't visualize him confiding in anyone, even Betty Purcell at the early stage of their relationship. So how could anyone know about him and the money?"

I paused. "Then I realized

that New York trip you'd cited, two months ago when Barlow's act had been publicized in the New England press, which likely would also mean the New York area. Quite possibly you'd read the account, seen his picture and remembered both three nights ago."

Winter's chair creaked as he got to his feet.

"It was one of those spur-of-the-moment things," he said simply. "When Emma called me over there, I recognized Barlow, recalled what he'd done. I found the money when I first searched the room, and I knew I could use it."

The sheriff made a small gesture. "Once committed, I couldn't turn back. I kept telling myself it wasn't a truly large amount, that its loss would be covered by insurance. Then when you showed up and everything snowballed with Andy's involvement, I didn't know how to play it."

I made no rejoinder, reflecting on Winter's intended 'use' of the money.

"Emma Graham's a fine woman," the sheriff went on soberly. "I've known and admired her for years, wanted to help her now. She needn't have known where the money came from." He took a turn about the office. "That isn't to

suggest I wasn't wrong. I'm still a lawman turned thief."

That he was, if one went by the book. But I found myself seeing Walt Winter as guilty only to a degree; as basically a decent individual who'd been snared by one impulsive, well-intentioned act.

I drew a breath. "The money's here?"

He fumbled in his desk, came up with a compact package.

"It's here, all nine thousand." His gaze was direct. "Now what?"

Good question. I borrowed time to fire a cigarette, wheels clicking in my head. Finally, I said, "To start, I suggest you go back, tell Andy Clay you've decided to believe him, that there's no charges pending on his invading Barlow's room. He'll wonder about the money; but I can still be investigating the case elsewhere."

As Winter went back to the cell block, I in turn left his office, returned to the hotel. I'm here now, still pondering the sheriff's last query. My assignment's over. To my employer, I simply recovered the money in Fred Barlow's room. He'd hidden it well, and it had been overlooked in Sheriff Winter's initial search.

As to Winter's 'now what?' I just may pull out of Sea Harbor without giving him any answer.

# INCHES TOO SHORT

by

HERBERT HARRIS

*Who had driven that  
car of death? Only  
the killer—and a few  
inches could tell.*

WHEN INSPECTOR Lane arrived, Rosina Mansi was about to leave on her last car ride—to the morgue.

"Sorry to be so late," Lane said. "Got held up. What have you found out?"

Sergeant Mead hesitated a moment. He didn't find it easy to rid his mind of the dark beauty of the girl who had been strangled.

"The girl was half Italian..." Lane snapped: "I'd gathered that by her name. A tart?"

"It's obvious she had been, sir, by what people say."



"Funny place for a girl like that to live in." Lane's eyes ranged the isolated cottage, and the garden skirted at the rear by a lonely road through a wood.

Mead nodded. "She had an

apartment in town, but seems to have acquired some money and bought this cottage."

Lane sighed. "Bags of men friends, no doubt, just to make things difficult."

"No doubt, sir." The young sergeant smiled. "But the field is considerably narrowed down."

"Already? That's good."

"Rosina Mansi was strangled at about eleven last night. And at that time the man visiting her left his car in the wood behind the cottage."

Lane lifted his eyebrows.

"It's one of those breaks we don't get often, sir. The car was parked on that lonely road between the bottom of the garden and the wood."

"Careless, eh?"

"Well, nobody ever uses the road. It leads nowhere. But it happens that a gamekeeper was roaming about looking for a poacher. He saw the car."

"He thought it might have been abandoned and made a note of the number. We got a description, too. A blue Arrow. Nice little job."

"That's something, isn't it! Who owns it?"

"Sir George Wayne."

The inspector whistled. "The Whitehall big shot?"

"Yes, sir. Lives at Marldean, a few miles up the road. House called Cobwebs."

"You *have* been busy, haven't you? Have you spoken to him?"

"No, sir. But the gamekeeper knew a bit about him. Sir George has an Italian chauffeur—a little chap named Joe Grandi. Might be a lead... the dead girl being Italian."

The inspector pursed his lips. "You mean the chauffeur might have been using the car? Yes, that's a point. Come on, we'll go right away and find out what Sir George and his chauffeur have to say."

Sir George Wayne was a tall, slim, dignified-looking man with the slight stoop that many long, slender people have. The hair at his temples was tinged with grey.

He received Inspector Lane and Sergeant Mead wearing a dressing-gown, and the inspector said: "I'm sorry that we have to disturb you so early, Sir George. Have we interrupted your breakfast?"

"That's quite all right—I *have* breakfasted."

"We're investigating the murder of a Miss Rosina Mansi at a cottage at Welford..."

The baronet's face became grave. "Oh, yes... I saw the story in this morning's paper. A dreadful business. How can I help."

Lane searched his face. "By explaining what your car was

doing parked outside the girl's cottage at eleven o'clock last night."

Some of the color left Sir George's face. "My car? But that's impossible."

"No, sir. A witness has described the car and given the number."

Sir George said: "Somebody with a grudge perhaps. I didn't use my car last night. I didn't use it at all."

"You remained at home?"

"Yes. I spent the evening listening to my records. I'm a lover of the classics. I often. . ."

"You have a chauffeur named Joe Grandi?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Was he with you last night?"

"Of course not. I was alone. I'd given him the evening off."

"Could he have taken your car without your knowing?"

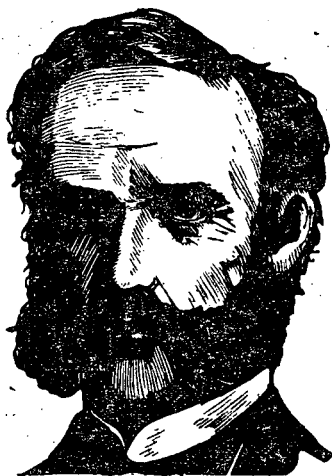
Sir George hesitated. "Yes, he could if he'd wanted. I play my records rather loudly, as I'm slightly hard of hearing, and the garage is the other side of the house."

The inspector frowned. "The murdered girl was half-Italian. Your chauffeur was Italian. Were they friends?"

"It's possible," Sir, George said. "Why not ask him?"

"Is he here?"

"Yes, he arrived a short time ago. He's probably cleaning the



### *His dream has spread all over the World*

The suffering Henri Dunant saw on the battlefields of Europe moved him not to tears but to action. In 1863, heeding his plea, 16 nations, along with welfare and learned societies, founded the first international organization for relief of war victims. Its symbol—a red cross.

This year—a full century later—that same symbol of hope is found throughout the world. Wherever help is needed, Red Cross is . . .

*Always there...  
with your help* **RED CROSS**

car. We'll go and talk to him if you like. But give me a few moments to get into some respectable clothes."



Joe Grandi was taking an oil-reading on the dipstick. He looked up curiously as the three approached.

Lane said into the sergeant's ear: "Does the number check?"

Mead murmured: "Yes, it's the car all right."

Sir George introduced his two visitors, and the diminutive Italian looked up at his towering employer with evident apprehension. Sir George said immediately, "Grandi, did you take the car out last night?"

"Me, sir? No, sir!"

Sir George frowned at the C.I.D. men. "You appear to be making a mistake, gentlemen."

Lane made two circuits around the car, walking slowly, studying it intently. Sergeant Mead, watching him worriedly, said: "If you're in any doubt. . ."

Ignoring him, the inspector turned to Grandi. . . "When did you last drive the car, if not last night?"

"It was yesterday morning," the chauffeur said. "I drove Sir George up to London. We came back after lunch."

"That's quite right," Sir George confirmed.

"And the car wasn't used again yesterday?"

"Not to my knowledge," Sir George said. "If Grandi took it out last night, he'd say so. Wouldn't you, Grandi?"

"I can prove I didn't have it last night" Grandi said slowly, a flush burning his cheeks.

Quietly, the inspector said: "You don't have to prove it, Grandi. I've already done that."

He turned and looked searchingly at Sir George. "You drove the car last night, Sir George. It probably wasn't your first visit to Rosina Mansi's place, but nobody ever saw you go there, because you used the lonely woodland road.

"It's unlucky for you that you were seen last night by a gamekeeper, who was also trying not to be seen."

The baronet's face slowly drained of blood.

"Was she blackmailing you, Sir George?"

Sir George didn't answer. His throat moved convulsively, but no sound emerged from his lips.

Lane turned and pointed. "Look at the driver's seat in the car! Grandi is only a little over five feet tall. If he'd driven that car last night, his feet wouldn't have reached the pedals!"

With fear in his eyes, the baronet stared at the driver's seat.

"You set the seat for yourself, Sir George, because you're a foot taller. But you made one fatal slip—surprising for a man of your intellect. You forgot to push the seat forward again when you put the car away!"

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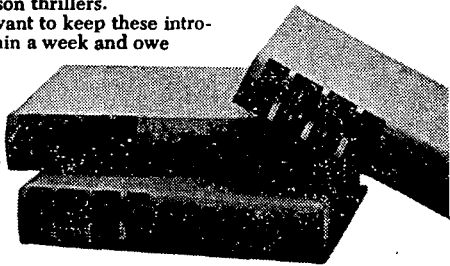
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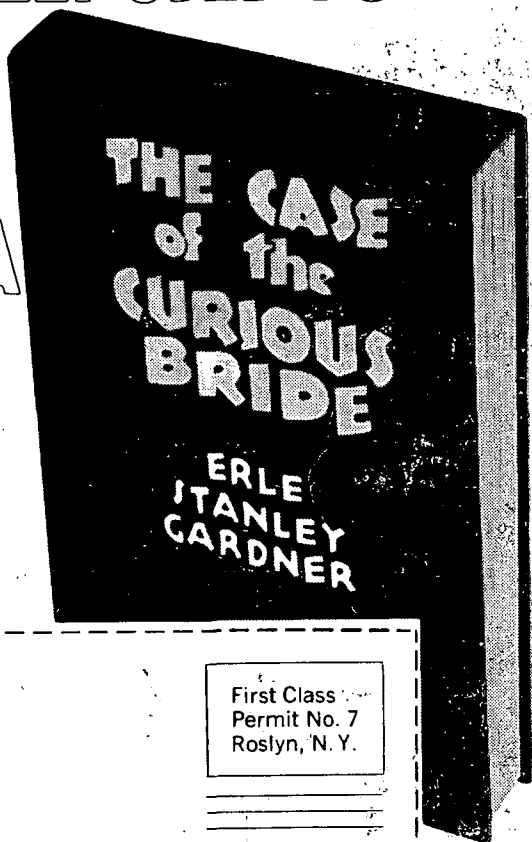


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